Now, Nur Misuari wants visa to go to US

STORY ON PAGE A2

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS
THURSDAY, JANUARY 3, 2002 ★ 30 PAGES 2 SECTIONS VOL.17 NO. 26 P15

Press czar flexes muscle, raps Solgen

BY DONA Z. PAZZIBUGAN

THE FIRST "victim" of Malacañang's information "clearinghouse" is Solicitor General Simeon Marcelo.

Manuel Sanchez, press undersecretary for broadcast and now chief press "coordinator," yesterday rapped Marcelo for statements he made to the INQUIRER voicing his misgivings about the $540-million deal between San Miguel Corp.

PRESS/ A12

LTO anomalies linked to killing

Cervantes turned over intel reports to civilians

BY JEROME ANING, TJ BURGONIO AND CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA

A REPORT of the anomalies in the Land Transportation Office (LTO) when it was headed by retired Gen. Edgardo Abenina is another angle the police are looking into in the killing of Baron Cervantes, the self-described spokesperson of the Young Officers Union.

Cervantes turned the documents on the anomalies to the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC) a few days before Christmas, VACC chair and president Dante Jimenez yesterday said.

Jimenez said he had turned over copies of the documents to the Southern Police District (SPD) which could provide leads as to the motive behind the Cervantes killing on Dec. 31.

Jimenez said, "most of the documents pertained to bidding irregularities in the LTO."

The anomalies were believed to have been one of the reasons that prompted Malacañang to replace Abenina on Dec. 21.

Retired Commodore Domingo Calajate, chair of the Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa (RAM), had urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to fire Abenina because of the alleged anomalies.

Calajate had also accused Abenina of being a benefactor of Supt. Rafael Cardeño, who was tagged last October as instigator of a destabilization plot against the Macapagal administration.

Cardeño, chair of the Young Officers Union (YOU), was relieved as Abenina's special assistant in November and reassigned to the Visayas.

Abenina and Cardeño are among the members of YOU and RAM the police plan to question about Cervantes' murder.

They are among those whom Cervantes had accused of plotting a coup against the Macapagal administration.

"All those names that cropped up during the investigation will be called," Director General Leandro Mendoza, chief of the Philippine National Police, yesterday said when asked if police investigators would call in the YOU and RAM members named by Cervantes in an intelligence report as the coup plotters.

Hours before he was shot in Las Piñas on Monday night, Cervantes delivered an intelligence report to Pastor "Boy" Saycon, head of the Council on Philippine Affairs (Copa), at the latter's residence in Ayala Alabang, Muntinlupa.

LTO/ A13

CERVANTES

'Baron very pissed off with gov't'

BY CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA AND CARLITO PABLO

BEFORE he was killed, Baron Alexander Cervantes was planning to form a multisectoral "wake-up" group that would pressure the Macapagal administration into delivering on the promises it made during People Power II.

According to a source who said he had been asked to join the group and who spoke on condition of anonymity, Cervantes also invited a lawyer of Sen. Panfilo Lacson as well as members of the militant group Sanlakas, a vocal critic of the administration, to form its core.

"Baron was very pissed off with the administration," the source told the INQUIRER Tuesday night at the slain man's wake at the Holy Trinity Funeral Homes in Parañaque City. "He felt that the government had failed to fulfill its promises to the people. He badly wanted reforms."

BARON/ A13

GEN. (ret.) EDGARDO ABENINA

SUPT. RAFAEL CARDEÑO

COL. (ret.) ROMEO LIM

CAPT. (ret.) PROCESO MALIGALIG

LT. SG DONN ANTHONY MIRAFLOR

SUPT. DIOSDADO VALEROSO

ALLEGED coup plotters (above) named by Baron Cervantes in an intelligence report he submitted to Pastor Saycon, head of the Council on Philippine Affairs, just hours before his murder.

Civilian pals, not military comrades, came to honor him

BY CHRISTIAN V. ESGUERRA

PROMINENT members of the Young Officers Union and the Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa snubbed the wake of Baron Alexander Cervantes on Tuesday.

The two rightist groups, which staged several coup attempts during the Aquino administration, did not even send a bouquet of flowers for the slain Army officer.

Instead, Cervantes got a mouthful of scathing criticisms from Col. Romeo Lim of RAM-YOU, calling him an opportunist and an impostor in a television interview Tuesday.

But the fallen soldier got a strong show of support from the Council on Philippine Affairs (Copa) and other cause-oriented groups.

CIVILIAN/ A13

Dramatic impact seen in $1-B recovery fund

BY JULIET L. JAVELLANA

A US-BASED international investment bank will set up a $1-billion Philippine Recovery Fund, in part to buy bad loans from Philippine banks and to construct middle-class and low-income housing, Speaker Jose de Venecia announced yesterday.

The Lehman Brothers fund could "signal a dramatic recovery for the Philippine economy," De Venecia said at a joint news conference with Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho and Bangko Sentral Governor Rafael Buenaventura.

He said the fund would have a "dramatic impact" on the Macapagal administration's economic recovery program because it would provide liquidity to the government, raise long-term capital, lower interest rates, expand home ownership, generate employment and foster a strong and sustainable domestic capital market. *(See related story in Business, Page B1.)*

De Venecia said the fund would be used to buy "non-performing loans" and real estate assets of government banks and financial institutions and foreclosed real estate and residential mortgage portfolios of Philippine commercial banks valued at P150 billion, and to finance new housing projects and other economic programs of the Macapagal administration.

"It's not foreign or external debt," De Venecia emphasized. "It's pure equity in Philippine businesses . . . a multipurpose equity fund that will go to several economic priorities of the Philippine government."

Lehman's chief executive for Asia-Pacific, Jasitt Bhattal, identified the purposes of the fund in a letter to President

DRAMATIC/ A12

23 more plunder cases in P5.3-B tax credit scam

AT least 23 more plunder cases will be filed this year by the special presidential task force probing the P5.3-billion tax credit certificates scam, with two former executives of the company that appeared to have gained the most from the scam turning state witness.

Palace sources said Special Presidential Task Force 156 would file the second plunder case next week, about a month after it filed the first case against two top officials of Petron and Pilipinas Shell, three former Department of Finance officials and six business executives.

According to the sources, two former executives of the Chingkoe group of companies will turn state witnesses and pinpoint previously unidentified suspects who facilitated the preparation, issuance, release and transfer of fake tax credit certificates (TCCs).

The sources did not name either the two executives or the second group of respondents, but in an interview last month the task force chair, Finance Undersecretary Cornelio Gison, said the second case would include some "powerful people" and former DOF officials.

The Chingkoe group is said to be the single biggest beneficiary of the tax credit scam, accounting for almost half of the P5.3 billion in fraudulently issued TCCs. The two former Chingkoe executives have already executed af-

23 MORE/ A12

Guess, who won P200M?

BY ABIGAIL L. HO

TV GAME shows like "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire" and love-counseling programs like "Lovenotes Hotline" earned Philippine Long Distance Telephone Co. about P200 million last year.

Joaquin San Agustin, PLDT national retail marketing vice president, said the game shows and love counseling and fortune telling programs contributed more than 20 million minutes to PLDT's

GUESS/ A12

Marines out; US-trained unit to rescue hostages

BY ARLYN DELA CRUZ, *Contributor* AND MARTIN MARFIL

BECAUSE "nothing has happened" to their rescue of the remaining hostages of the Abu Sayyaf, Philippine Marines stationed in Basilan will be redeployed to Sulu.

Within the next 48 hours at least two companies of Marines are scheduled to be pulled out of Basilan.

By the second week of January, the entire brigade of the Philippine Marines in Basilan will be out of there and transferred to Sulu.

The pullout of the Marines gives a new twist to the military operations to rescue the American missionary couple, Martin and Gracia Burnham and Filipina nurse, Deborah Yap.

Three Philippine Army Brigades composed mostly of Scout Ranger companies and the Light Reaction Unit trained by the US Delta Force will replace the Marines.

The Southern Command sees a better need for the Marines in Sulu because of threats from the Misuari Renegade Forces (MRF). The Scout Rangers who are trained for jungle warfare will be given the upperhand in the rescue operations.

The redeployment of the Marines was decided after a "critique" of the rescue operations during a joint command conference last Dec.

MARINES/ A12

Second FRONT PAGE

PWEDE BA YUN?

Misuari wants to go to US

By Norman Bordadora
Michael Lim Ubac
and TJ Burgonio

RENEGADE Moro leader Nur Misuari has asked the Malaysian government to allow him to apply for a visa to the United States, where he has been invited by the radical Nation of Islam to join a lecture tour of 41 universities across America.

The Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila is confident, however, Misuari's visa application would be denied, whether to the US or any other country.

"(Asking the US not to grant Misuari a visa) would not be necessary... I say this because there is an existing agreement between our government and Malaysia to return Misuari to the Philippines," said DFA Assistant Secretary Victoriano Lecaros.

Islamic congress

In a letter to Malaysian authorities, Misuari's lawyer Elly Pamatong asked that his client be allowed to apply for a US visa because he has been invited by black Muslim leader Louis Farrakhan to attend an Islamic congress and to speak at 41 universities.

The Islamic congress will be held in Los Angeles, Pamatong said, while the lectures would be in various cities across the US.

Pamatong asked Norian Mai, inspector general of the Malaysian police, to grant him custody of Misuari in behalf of his family.

This is intended, he said, to enable Misuari's family to accompany him when he applies for a visa.

An American Embassy source in Manila said it was highly unlikely the US would grant Misuari a visa, considering the Philippines wants him back to face rebellion charges.

Not that easy

"How could Misuari be given a visa when, politically, he has a problem? His is a high profile case... I don't think applying for a visa will be that easy," the embassy source said.

Another source, however, admitted that a person facing court charges may not necessarily be denied a US visa.

"Misuari will first have to return to his country of origin, in this case, the Philippines, before he can apply for a visa," the source pointed out.

In preparation for Misuari's return to Manila by Jan. 15, the Department of Justice has formed an "elite" team that would escort Misuari from Malaysia to the Philippines.

And in an apparent move to prevent a backlash from Misuari's tribesmen, a Tausug who is also an official of the National Bureau of Investigation will be included in the team composed of officials of the DOJ, DFA, PNP and the Armed Forces.

This was confirmed yesterday by NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco, who asked that the NBI official's name be withheld.

"He is an NBI official assigned in Luzon, not Mindanao," was all Wycoco would say.

In a separate interview, however, Justice Secretary Hernando Perez said a Mr. Chong from the NBI district office in Jolo, Sulu, would be part of the elite team. He did not say, however, if Chong was the same man Wycoco was referring to.

Elite team

Asked who would head the team, Wycoco said, "I don't know, but it should be Gen. Leandro Mendoza—our PNP chief."

Perez said he has created a four-man team to handle the rebellion case against Misuari.

The team is headed by Chief State Prosecutor Jovencito Zuño, with Senior State Prosecutor Leo Dacera, State Prosecutor Richard Anthony Fadullon and Zamboanga City Prosecutor Manuel Tatel as members.

For his part, Mendoza has designated the PNP's top investigator, Director Lucas Managuelod, to lead the team that would serve the arrest warrant on Misuari.

"He's a lawyer and he's the head of our Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management," Mendoza said of Managuelod.

ROGER MARGALLO

SENIOR JET SET

Senior citizens on wheelchairs wait for their luggage at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport upon arrival from the United States. With the decline of air travel in the US after Sept. 11, tourism officials have turned to balikbayans, including these elderly travelers, for tourism arrivals during the holidays.

Moro rebs occupy village, but vow to help free priest

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Muslim rebels briefly occupied part of a Maguindanao town, drawing Army artillery and mortar fire to drive them out, the regional military spokesperson said yesterday.

Some 300 rebels from the separatist Moro Islamic Liberation Front occupied a district of Mamasapano town in Maguindanao on Monday, burning three houses and sending residents fleeing, spokesperson Capt. Noel Detoyato said.

"Their occupation was totally a violation of the ceasefire" signed by the government and the 12,500 strong MILF in August, Detoyato said.

Troops, backed by armored vehicles, two MG520 attack helicopters, mortars and 105mm howitzers fired on the MILF forces, driving them out of the town and causing an unknown number of casualties, Detoyato said.

The MILF occupied part of the town in apparent retaliation for a clash with local civilian armed volunteers on Sunday when a guerrilla leader was killed.

Detoyato said they were investigating the incident to file a complaint over the ceasefire violation.

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu denied violating the ceasefire, saying the rebels merely went to the area to convince local leaders to hand over government militiamen behind the guerrilla leader's death.

The MILF remains committed to peace talks with the government, he added, noting that committees monitoring the ceasefire from both sides were due to meet next week to strengthen its implementation.

Kabalu also said that the MILF was working independently to help free Italian priest Giuseppe Pierantoni who was seized by the notorious Pentagon kidnap gang.

Pierantoni "is still very much alive" and held by the Pentagon somewhere in Mindanao, Kabalu said.

"We are trying to help, but we are in the forefront (of rescue operations). We are doing our own initiative to make sure that nothing untoward happens to this priest," Kabalu told dzBB radio in Manila.

The MILF was also willing to have a "formal alliance" with police in conducting rescue operations, Kabalu said, but stressed this required a request from the government's peace panel.

Pierantoni was seized in October in his parish in southern Zamboanga del Sur province by the Pentagon gang, which the military says is mostly made up of former MILF rebels.

Another Muslim-led kidnap gang, the Abu Sayyaf, is holding hostage an American missionary couple and a Filipina nurse in the island of Basilan.

The 12,500-strong MILF has been waging a rebellion for an independent Islamic state in the south since 1978. It has entered into peace talks with the government and in August signed a ceasefire.

Kabalu said the MILF leadership was optimistic about the peace initiatives by the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo, adding that the next round of talks would likely resume this month.

The MILF rebellion fighting for an independent Islamic state in the south was launched in 1978, and despite the ceasefire, sporadic clashes with government forces still occur. *AFP*

Managuelod to serve US summons on Lacson

DIRECTOR Lucas Managuelod of the Philippine National Police will serve this week the summons on Sen. Panfilo Lacson in connection with a civil case stemming from an aborted handcuffs deal.

"The summons would be served either on Thursday or Friday when he is supposed to arrive. I heard he's out of town" he told reporters. However, he did not say where the senator went.

Managuelod, head of the Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management, has been designated to serve the summons on Lacson by PNP chief Director General Leandro Mendoza.

He said the summons would be served on Lacson at his office at the Senate building in Pasay City.

Managuelod said he saw no problem in the serving of the summons, saying "This is routine. I just need to have it received by the senator."

The summons was addressed to Mendoza, Justice Secretary Hernando Perez and Director Reynaldo Wycoco of the National Bureau of Investigation.

The Superior Court of California in Alameda County issued the summons to Lacson in connection with a $3 million civil case filed by businesswoman Blanquita Pelaez on Dec. 10 last year.

The court gave him 30 days to file a "typewritten response."

Pelaez sued Lacson and 30 John Does "for intentional interference with economic relationship, slander and emotion distress."

The case arose from the non-payment of 41,297 handcuffs ordered by the PNP in December 1996 from Smith and Wesson Co., where Pelaez worked as the exclusive supplier.

Pelaez's lawyer, Rodel Rodis, forwarded a copy of both the summons and the complaint to Mendoza, Perez with a request that they serve the summons.

Pelaez charged that Lacson had approached her in August 1999 and promised that he would approve the payment of the handcuffs if she supports his bid to become PNP chief.

High court asked to halt toll increase

By Michael Lim Ubac

THE SUPREME Court was yesterday asked to issue a temporary restraining order to stop the Toll Regulatory Board from implementing the new increased toll rates at the South and North Luzon expressways, and the Skyway.

In a taxpayer's suit, lawyer Ceferino Padua claimed that the new rates "smack of large-scale swindling of motorists."

He pleaded with the high tribunal to provide "immediate relief" to commuters using the expressways and the Skyway.

Padua also asked the SC to declare as null and void the TRB order authorizing the collection of the new toll rates for the next six months, and reverse Makati Judge Santiago Ranada's decision dismissing his petition for a TRO.

On Dec. 28, Parañaque Rep. Eduardo Zialcita asked the Parañaque Regional Trial Court to stop the increases as they had been approved by the TRB allegedly without a public hearing.

He said the provisional increase was "exorbitant, onerous, oppressive and unconscionable."

The TRB announced in an unsigned advisory on Dec. 21 that the Citra Metro Manila Tollways Corp. (CMMTC), which operates the Southern Luzon Tollways (SLT) and the Skyway, would start collecting new fees starting Jan. 1 until June 30, when another round of toll fee increases is scheduled.

The SLT cover the stretch of Magallanes, Makati, to Alabang, Muntinlupa, while the North Luzon Tollways (NLT) run from Balintawak, Quezon City to Barangay Tabang in Guiguinto, Bulacan.

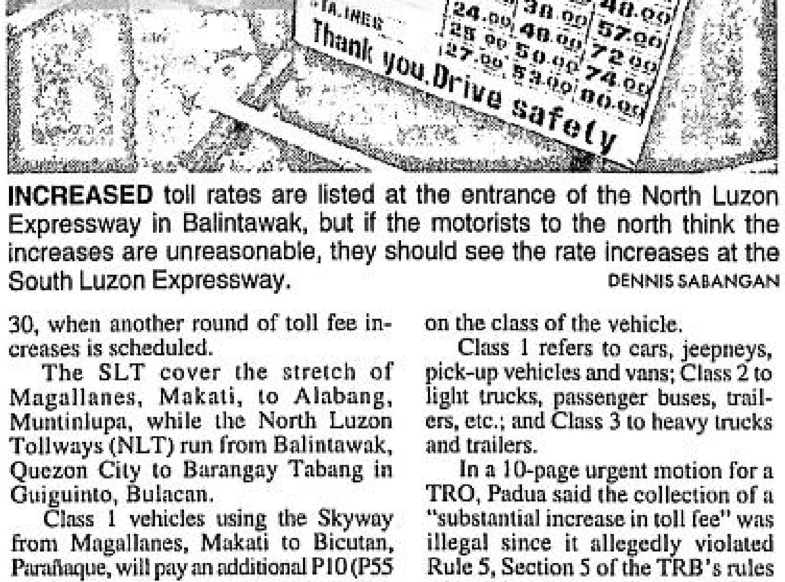
Class 1 vehicles using the Skyway from Magallanes, Makati to Bicutan, Parañaque, will pay an additional P10 (P55 to P65); Class 2, P20 more (P110 to P130); and Class 3, P30 (P165 to P195).

At the "at-grade" segment of the SLT (below the Skyway), motorists have to pay from P5 to P15, depending on the class of the vehicle.

Class 1 refers to cars, jeepneys, pick-up vehicles and vans; Class 2 to light trucks, passenger buses, trailers, etc.; and Class 3 to heavy trucks and trailers.

In a 10-page urgent motion for a TRO, Padua said the collection of a "substantial increase in toll fee" was illegal since it allegedly violated Rule 5, Section 5 of the TRB's rules of practice and procedure.

Under the rules, the TRB order on provisional adjustment rate should be published for three consecutive weeks in a newspaper of general circulation.


TOLL RATES
EXIT POINTS
CLASS
1
2
3
MAPULANG LUPA 2.00 4.00 6.00
VALENZUELA 3.00 5.00 7.00
LAWANG BATO 3.00 6.00 9.00
MEYCAUAYAN 4.00 8.00 11.00
MARILAO 5.00 10.00 15.00
BOCAUE 6.00 12.00 18.00
BALAGTAS 8.00 16.00 23.00
GUIGUINTO 9.00 17.00 25.00
TABANG 10.00 19.00 28.00
STA RITA 10.00 20.00 30.00
PULILAN 12.00 24.00 36.00
SAN SIMON 16.00 32.00 40.00
SAN FERNANDO 19.00 38.00 57.00
ANGELES 24.00 40.00 72.00
DAU 25.00 50.00 74.00
STA. INES 27.00 53.00 80.00
Thank you. Drive safety

INCREASED toll rates are listed at the entrance of the North Luzon Expressway in Balintawak, but if the motorists to the north think the increases are unreasonable, they should see the rate increases at the South Luzon Expressway. DENNIS SABANGAN

Gloria's accuser ordered arrested

IMMIGRATION Commissioner Andrea Domingo has ordered the arrest of businessman Pacifico Marcelo after he failed to submit himself before the Bureau of Immigration to clarify his citizenship status yesterday.

Domingo over the holidays set Jan. 2 as the deadline for the chairperson of the Philippine Communication and Clearinghouse Inc. to appear before the bureau to explain his citizenship and produce documents that would prove his being a Filipino.

Only a certain Attorney Dela Cerna appeared for Marcelo yesterday at the bureau and Domingo said he failed to come up with the necessary documents that would prove the Filipino citizenship of his client.

"If he doesn't appear before the bureau to explain and to present the necessary documents, I will order his arrest first thing tomorrow morning," Domingo said yesterday afternoon.

Marcelo failed to appear before the bureau through the afternoon until the close of office hours.

Marcelo accused President Macapagal-Arroyo of demanding 51 percent of his company in exchange for a presidential favor. He was seeking the recall of the presidential veto of his telecommunications franchise.

He was taken into custody by the opposition in the Senate as he testified before the blue ribbon committee.

The businessman was first given until Dec. 17 to present his citizenship papers but the date was declared a holiday as it signaled the end of the Muslim month of Ramadan.

GMA in Bicol for 5th time

NAGA CITY—President Macapagal-Arroyo is now in the Bicol region, her fifth visit since she became president almost a year ago, "this time to seriously consider approaches to development for the region."

Undersecretary Crisanto Castro Jr., chief of the Presidential Assistance for Regional Development Office for Bicol, said Ms Macapagal would talk directly to the people in depressed towns here in order to know first hand their needs.

The President's previous visits had been more of political and social functions.

Yesterday, she visited the towns of Balud, Pio V. Corpus and Milagros before settling at Masbate City where she stayed overnight.

She will be in Sorsogon this morning and in Legazpi City in the afternoon.

Castro said the visit was aimed at putting flesh in the Kalahi Program, the Macapagal administration's program for the poor.

He added that Ms Macapagal wanted to see for herself the actual needs and projects in depressed communities in Bicol.

The presidential assistant said the Kalahi Program aims to generate jobs and improve agricultural productivity, which, he said, are also the means for the present administration to arrest poverty.

Castro said his office is tasked with supervising the Kalahi Program which local governments have to implement.

A non-government group here noted that the program of the Macapagal administration has to be further translated into an action plan to succeed in Bicol, the second poorest region in the country.

Jean Llorin of the Hearts of Peace (Hope) said civil society groups would conduct this year a series of consultations with different sectors in the Bicol region to further formulate sectoral agenda. *Juan Escandor Jr., PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Erap wants new justices in plunder trial

ESTRADA

BY VOLT CONTRERAS

JOSEPH Estrada's lawyers want to move his plunder and two other criminal cases from the Sandiganbayan's Third Division to a new division.

Lawyer Cleofe Versola said yesterday the defense will file a motion this week seeking to "re-raffle" the ousted president's cases out of the Third Division because of the current interim composition of the court's bench.

Even before the court went on a Christmas break, the Estrada camp had considered asking that his cases be moved to another court.

In press interviews, defense counsel Rene Saguisag had likened the impermanent setup of the Third Division's three-seat bench to a "convenience store" style of administering justice.

This after the Third Division had to recruit two justices from another division as a result of two developments: the retirement of Associate Justice Ricardo Ilarde, a Third Division regular member, and the Supreme Court-imposed "indefinite leave" on Associate Justice Anacleto Badoy, division chair.

Since then, Versola said, the Third Division had been tapping "mere substitutes" to hear the plunder trial of Estrada, his co-accused son Jinggoy Estrada and his lawyer Edward Serapio.

Versola said the court hearing a case as important as the Estradas' should have permanent members who would be able to "thoroughly study" the evidence presented.

Ilarde was replaced by Associate Justice Nicodemo Ferrer, a junior member of the Fourth Division, in an interim assignment until Malacañang appoints Ilarde's permanent replacement.

Badoy, meanwhile, was replaced on a "per hearing" basis by Associate Justice Narciso Nario, Fourth Division chair.

Even before his forced leave, Badoy, who is due to retire in October, had missed several hearings in succession because of ill health.

The Third Division, apart from hearing the plunder case against Estrada, is also hearing one of Estrada's two perjury cases and another one in which he stands accused of illegal use of alias.

Estrada's plunder trial will resume Jan. 7.

Yesterday, Versola also announced that Estrada will ask the court's permission to undergo cataract surgery, this time on his right eye, preferably next month.

The deposed leader had a cataract removed from his left eye Dec. 16 last year at a high-end eye clinic at the exclusive Rockwell Center in Makati City.

DRUG BUST: Hundreds of kilos of shabu.

Drugs worth ₱2B seized last year

BY CYNTHIA D. BALANA

POLICE last year arrested a total of 57 foreigners and seized more than 1,000 kgs of methamphetamine hydrochloride worth more than P2 billion, Sen. Loren Legarda said.

Most of the suspects arrested were from mainland China, Legarda said, citing a report of the Citizens Drug Watch Foundation.

The senator is an official of the foundation, which compiled police reports for the year.

The report said 43 of the suspects, including 39 Chinese men, two Chinese women, one Australian and a Taiwanese could face the death penalty if convicted.

The report did not count Filipinos arrested for alleged involvement in drug trafficking. It also did not say whether the number of arrests of foreigners declined or increased from the previous years.

Legarda said the biggest single bust last year was in October when 498 kgs of methamphetamine hydrochloride, popularly known as shabu, was seized in Real town in Quezon province.

Police arrested a town mayor, a Chinese man and two Filipinos allegedly hauling the drugs aboard a van and an ambulance bound for Manila.

The second biggest drug haul resulted in the capture of three Chinese nationals and the seizure of 350 kgs of shabu in Zambales province, said Legarda.

The list did not include 14 other foreigners who were arrested and found to be in possession of drugs in amounts that would not qualify them for life imprisonment or the death penalty if convicted, Legarda said.

Because of the country's worsening drug problem, Legarda appealed to congressional colleagues for support in approving new measures to curb the illegal drug trade from both the supply and demand sides.

Apart from the proposed law against racketeering and international crime organizations patterned after the anti-RICO law in the US, Legarda also sought swift approval of separate bills seeking to deprive drug suspects of the privilege of probation.

The proposed law also would require the mandatory confinement and rehabilitation of known drug users.

Legarda also pushed for the creation of permanent special criminal courts that would exclusively and continuously try drug cases.

The senator also pushed for the bills providing for the establishment of more state-run drug treatment facilities and mandatory preventive drug education in schools.

With a report from AP

Isabela farmers accuse SMC of landgrabbing

BY GERALD G. LACUARTA

FARMERS' groups yesterday urged the Department of Agrarian Reform to intervene in an alleged landgrabbing case involving San Miguel Corp., which would displace more than 30,000 peasant families in 11 towns of Isabela province.

The Kilusang Magbubukid ng Pilipinas accused the Macapagal-Arroyo administration of entering into a "political accommodation" with SMC chair Eduardo Cojuangco Jr. in allowing the cassava plantation project in Isabela.

KMP chair Rafael Mariano said that municipal and provincial agrarian reform officers in Isabela have been confiscating and canceling certificates of land ownership awards (CLOAs), certificates of land transfer (CLTs), and emancipation patents (EPs) that had been distributed under the Comprehensive Agrarian Reform Program.

Cassava project

The cassava plantation project is a joint venture between the SMC and the Isabela provincial government under a 50-50 profit-sharing scheme.

The Isabela provincial government was represented by the Valley Planters Development Cooperative (Vapdeco) reportedly formed by Gov. Faustino Dy Jr.

"Under the guise of a 'contract-growing' scheme, Cojuangco and Dy conspired in this blatant landgrabbing in Isabela. This anti-peasant scheme definitely gives Cojuangco full control over the farmers' lands and the whole cassava production process, from seeding up to marketing," Mariano said.

The cassava plantation project will cover 11 towns of Isabela province: Quirino, Quezon, Mallig, Sta. Maria, Sto. Tomas, Delfin Albano, Ilagan, Western Cabagan, Burgos, Aurora and Gamu.

More than 29,000 hectares in the province will be immediately planted to cassava.

Food basket

"These areas are said to be the rice granary and food basket of the province," Mariano said.

The main purpose of the cassava plantation project was to provide raw materials and export products for the SMC's food manufacturing and export trading businesses, he said.

"The SMC started bulldozing activities last Dec. 13 in a 500-hectare agricultural property in Quirino town to be devoted to a cassava nursery, forcing more than 800 families from five villages to leave their farmlands," Mariano claimed.

Mariano said a total of 150,000 hectares of productive agricultural lands covered by CLOAs, CLTs, and EPs distributed under CARP are allegedly being "grabbed" by Cojuangco.

"The cancellation and confiscation of farmers' CLTs, CLOAs and EPs already escalated. We demand that the DAR immediately intervene on this matter and side with the farmers' interest," Mariano said.

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2 top Palace aides take oath

BY CARLITO PABLO

SILVESTRE Afable and Ricardo Saludo yesterday took their oaths as head of the Presidential Management Staff and Secretary to the Cabinet, respectively.

Their oaths were administered by Executive Secretary Alberto Romulo in Malacañang.

Afable and Saludo will take up the work of former PMS head and Cabinet Secretary Vicky Garchitorena who resigned effective Dec. 31.

Afable was Undersecretary for the Peace Process while Saludo was PMS undersecretary before their new appointments.

As PMS head, Afable will be responsible for policy work and studies in support of the functions of the Executive Secretary and the Office of the President.

Saludo, on the other hand, will oversee the conduct of Cabinet meetings and monitor the implementation by the Cabinet members of the targets set by President Macapagal-Arroyo in her state-of-the-nation address.

Saludo will also be in charge of monitoring the status of the implementation of directives issued by the President during Cabinet meetings, trips, forums and other functions.

Supreme Court of the Philippines
Judicial and Bar Council
Manila

Announcement

A. The Judicial and Bar Council announces the opening of **TWO (2)** positions of **ASSOCIATE JUSTICE** of the **SUPREME COURT**, which will be vacated by Justice Bernardo P. Pardo, on his compulsory retirement on 11 February 2002, and Justice Arturo B. Buena, also on his compulsory retirement on 25 March 2002.

B. The JBC also announces the opening of the position of **ASSOCIATE JUSTICE of the COURT OF APPEALS**, which will be vacated by Justice Ramon A. Barcelona on his compulsory retirement on 12 January 2002.

The applications or recommendations for these positions shall be filed not later than THURSDAY, 31 JANUARY 2002.

In case of recommendation, the recommendee shall conform with the recommendation.

The applications/recommendations must be addressed to:

The Secretariat
Judicial and Bar Council
Old Supreme Court Building
Padre Faura, Manila

2 January 2002.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Vol. 17 No. 26
ISSN 0116-2642

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The PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER, INC. has its business and editorial offices at Chino Roces Avenue (formerly Pasong Tamo) corner Yague and Mascardo Streets, Makati • P.O. Box 2353 Makati Central Post Office, 1263 Makati City, Philippines • Our new telephone numbers are 897-8808 connecting all departments; Editorial Fax 897-4793, 897-4794; Advertising 897-4807; Circulation 527-33-42, 527-33-48, 528-01-83, 528-01-86 and 528-02-13, Fax: 528-02-34.

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EDITORIALS

The absentee vote

PERHAPS we can judge the success or failure of the 12th Congress in the new year partly by its performance on the absentee voting issue.

Are we overstating the case? Consider the following:

The war to gain the right of suffrage has long been won; the right itself is enshrined in the Constitution. And yet when Filipinos find work overseas, they effectively lose their right to vote back home.

Anywhere between 4 and 10 million Filipinos work abroad, and their official remittances—money sent back to the Philippines through the formal banking and financial system—top $6 billion a year. In an important sense, their money helps keep the Philippine economy afloat. And yet, in spite of their critical economic role, a host of factors—the lack of fraud-proof election technology in Philippine embassies and consulates abroad, the lack of interest among officials otherwise preoccupied with the daily emergencies of governance, above all the lack of a law enabling overseas workers to participate in Philippine elections—prevent Filipinos abroad from exercising their vote.

This must change. The argument from technology is merely specious; if our forefathers had decided to wait for the perfect, tamper-proof election technology, we would never have had an election. The argument from priority is a more serious obstacle; in a sense, this is a cultural challenge. We can begin by reminding our public officials of the distinction between what is merely urgent and what is truly important—in this case, granting millions of productive, patriotic citizens the opportunity to cast their vote. The argument from law is the most practical; it is also the easiest to resolve, by legislators doing what they were hired to do.

The opportune time for doing this is this year, primarily because the local, congressional and national elections are still two years away. The time lag will effectively de-politicize the inevitable and necessary debates on the absentee voting bills and (we fondly hope) produce a law that will truly stand the test of time.

The two-year period will also allow the Commission on Elections, possibly in collaboration with the Department of Foreign Affairs and the various overseas labor agencies, to prepare properly and adequately for the country's first absentee election.

The overseas voter

IN MANY ways Philippine democracy is a continuing experiment, but on at least one variable the results are already clear and unmistakable: we take our right to vote seriously and exercise it religiously.

Our voter turnout has often been the envy of other countries. In spite of cheating politicians, harassed teachers, inefficient election officials and a general culture of protest, the number of Filipinos who troop to the polls at election time has always been a cause for pride.

Except, that is, for Filipinos working in precisely those countries. For them, watching their compatriots back home march to the election precincts is a lesson in irony, a painful reminder that there is no end to the sacrifices they must bear.

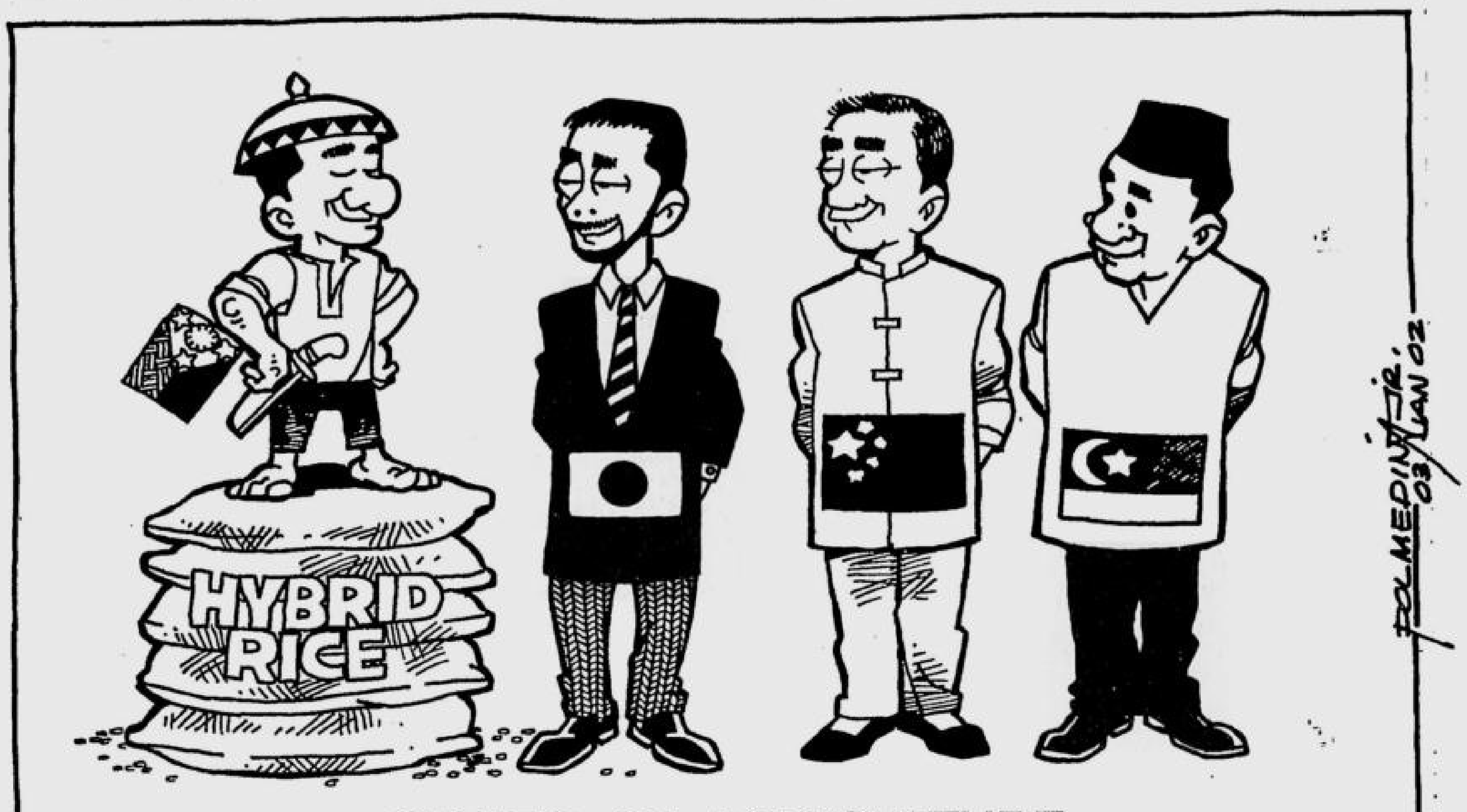
This is not to say that OFWs have no political influence or power at all. On the contrary, many continue to hold sway over their respective families' election choices.

The reason is deeply cultural. In ordinary circumstances, the breadwinner in a family has a major, even at times decisive, role to play in that family's decisions—political or otherwise. An OFW may be some distance from the voting booth, but in letters and phone calls home he can usually be counted on to indicate his preferences.

This is a cultural fact that politicians are sharply aware of. In Hong Kong, for example, which in many respects is the best organized of all OFW markets, candidates for local office become a common sight in the run-up to any election.

But important as this cultural function is, it still does not completely compensate for an overseas worker's inability to personally exercise his right. In fact, there is no substitute for the central democratic franchise: one man, one vote.

It is time for the Filipino working abroad to finally enjoy his right to vote.



GIANTS OF AGRICULTURE

Make firecrackers really safe

AS I SEE IT

Neal H. Cruz

THE GOVERNMENT is congratulating itself for the reduced number of firecracker-related deaths and injuries during the New Year's Eve merrymaking. Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit said casualties went down by 63 percent. As of 8 a.m. of Jan. 1, only 484 persons were reported injured by firecrackers and only two died, one a 29-year-old man who lighted a "fountain" that exploded in his face, and the other a 28-year-old man who was killed in a fire ignited by pyrotechnics.

But in Metro Manila alone, 18 fires were caused by pyrotechnics. One of those hit was Erap's controversial Boracay mansion in New Manila. On Mabini Street in Manila, a huge explosion ripped off the front glass wall and door of the City Garden Hotel, caused by a "*bawang*" that ignited a cache of pyrotechnics.

And, the Philippine National Police boasted, no one was killed by stray bullets although 10 persons, three of them policemen, were arrested for indiscriminately firing their guns.

Not good enough. There wouldn't be even a single casualty or fire caused by pyrotechnics and guns if the government were doing its job well. As Dayrit himself admitted, one reason for the reduced casualties was the economic depression that forced many people not to buy firecrackers to save money. So the government should stop patting itself on the back for "a job well done."

If you'll remember, the manufacture of pyrotechnics was legalized allegedly to make them safe. The fact that two died and 484 were injured proves that they are not. (Dayrit said the number could still go up as reports were still coming in. Others with minor injuries who did not go to the hospitals may later die of tetanus, he said. Last year, most of the fatalities died from tetanus.) Two deaths are two too many. If the firecrackers are really safe, there shouldn't be even one injury.

The answer is not to ban the selling and exploding of firecrackers as Mayor Rodrigo Duterte did in Davao City. We shouldn't deprive the Filipinos of this tradition of welcoming the New Year. And we shouldn't deprive the pyrotechnics-makers of their livelihood. The answer is to make these pyrotechnics 100-percent safe.

The law legalizing pyrotechnics manufacture enumerated those that can be safely made and exploded. The types of firecrackers that are banned are also enumerated. The fact that these banned explosives are still being manufactured, sold and exploded (and injuring people) means that the law is not being implemented strictly.

The government agencies supposed to implement the law are the PNP and local government units. The latter issue the permits and licenses and are supposed to inspect, monitor and supervise the manufacturing process. If they were not sleeping on the job, no banned and therefore dangerous firecracker would be manufactured in the first place. But the fact that the "*super lolo,*" "*pla-pla,*" "thunder" and other mini-bombs that can blast off fingers are still being manufactured and sold means that the LGUs are indeed sleeping on the job.

Even the "*bawang*" and the big "*triangulo*" which are not on the banned list should be banned because their explosions are strong enough to injure. And the innocent-looking "*watusi*" should also be banned because they have poisoned children who mistook them for candy. The law needs congressional amendment, which shouldn't be hard to do—if Congress is not sleeping on the job, too.

Can't the government teach our pyrotechnics manufacturers how to make the safe, cigarette-sized firecrackers that are made in Hong Kong and China? This will mean more sales and income for the manufacturers and sellers because they are tied together and explode one after another like a machine gun. A long string can produce explosions continuously for 15 minutes or longer. More consumption, more sales, more income.

As for the police, the raids on stores selling banned pyrotechnics are often only "extortion raids." Often, the seized pyrotechnics are sold by the policemen themselves. Indeed, at least two policemen were caught owning stores selling the banned firecrackers.

As for the policeman and civilians caught indiscriminately firing their guns during the New Year's Eve revelry, it is not enough just to arrest them. In a few days, they would be released and the cases against them forgotten. They would do the same thing again next year because they got off so easy this year. They should be prosecuted and sent to prison to teach them and the public a lesson.

* * *

KAPIHAN NOTES: The Kapihan sa Manila (Hotel) will resume on Monday, Jan. 7. Guests are Sen. Aquilino Pimentel Jr. and Environment Secretary Heherson Alvarez. They will answer questions on what they think the new year holds not only for the environment and Mindanao, but also for the government, the economy and, most entertaining of all, politics.

The true best picture

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

I SAW a dazzling Filipino movie the other weekend. It's not one of the entries in the current Metro Manila Film Festival. I don't know when—or if—it will be shown in regular theaters. I understand it's all the people who made the movie can do to find a booking for it.

I'm talking of Lav Diaz's "Batang West Side," which is a record Filipino movie in more ways than one. The most obvious way being that it is five hours and 15 minutes long, which in fact makes it a record movie anywhere in the world. There have been longer movies, one Japanese movie, if I recall right, being more than 12 hours, but they are meant to be watched in installments. This one demands to be seen in one blow. And should be. It's not episodic, it's one very tight piece of work.

Lav would tell me later he figured we had a fairly solid tradition of watching long movies, to go by the double features in the provinces. But double features are precisely two movies, not one, and are generally comedies and action movies. Not one that requires thoughtful and sustained attention.

Which is the reason "Batang West Side" is having problems finding a place for exhibition. I saw it in Glorietta 4, which is a very small theater with a reputation for showing largely non-commercial films. I understand that is also the reason it hasn't found a place in international film competitions—to which it eminently belongs—since festival organizers impose a time limit on movies. Even Francis Ford Copolla apparently had to trim down "Apocalypse Now" to less than three hours to meet that requirement.

I don't know what Lav can do to satisfy the demands of practicality and aesthetics, public acceptance and artistic integrity. But I do know his work deserves as wide an audience as possible, preferably in its pristine state. I wish him all the luck in the world.

"Batang West Side's" length aside, I myself am curious to know how the general public would greet its theme. It tells of the life of a group of Filipinos in America, which may not be so easy for everyone to relate to. I personally am wondering if my having gotten deeply engrossed in it does not owe to my having caught a glimpse of that life too. Certainly, the mood of the movie—which is one of the things it does so brilliantly, capture the mood of that life in all its wintry starkness—struck a sympathetic chord in me. But I also imagine that the phenomenon of the overseas Filipino workers will allow many Filipinos to experience the shock of recognition when they see the movie. The differences between living in the United States and in the OFW destinations—Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia—may be monumental, but not so the feelings of homesickness, alienation and a sense of drift.

In "Batang West Side," Joel Torre is a Filipino cop in New Jersey (West Point graduate and 10-year resident) who investigates the murder of a Filipino youth named Hansel Harana. The cop's investigation leads him to a confrontation partly with the world he left behind, and with a world he barely knows. The latter is the life of Filipinos in America, a life lived on the fringes, or margins, or pores, of society, with its huge pains and small triumphs, with its unrelenting drudgery and sudden bursts of violence, with its invisibility and assertion through drugs, particularly *shabu*, the gateway to power trips.

Above all, Torre's investigation leads him to a confrontation with himself, to his own demons, whose assaults have left him as emotionally crippled as *shabu* has done mentally to the objects of his sleuthing. The ending may be a little *bitin* to an audience used to straightforward resolutions—and which has waited for more than five hours to know what really happened to Harana; they might cry out "*harang*"—but I myself found it only as it should be. I'll leave the reader with that mysterious comment as an enticement to see the movie.

Everything about the movie is dazzling. It has very few false notes. The writing—which was done by Lav himself—is taut, the dialogue crisp and biting. He is one fantastic storyteller, introducing his details with the deftness of a magician performing a grand trick, till they work a shimmering, lingering, illusion—or truth—in the mind. He is an equally fantastic director, the whole movie resonating with control. Even the sudden bursts of violence are controlled—controlled fury is always more furious than a wanton one. The acting is uniformly excellent. Torre, of course, is his usual excellent self, but the revelation is Yul Servo, who essays the teenager Hansel. There's a boy to watch out for.

A fierce intelligence runs through this movie, an intelligence however that is not artsy-craftsy. On the contrary, it is one that has a lot of heart. I felt moved by this movie in ways most other movies have not moved me, local or foreign. It insinuates itself into the mind and heart so subtly you are not sure at what point you have yielded completely.

If I have any quibbles with the movie, they are very small ones. Chief of them is that the characters in this movie have very dysfunctional backgrounds. I would have been curious to see the effects of living in America—I suddenly remembered Woody Allen's quip that he believed there was an intelligence in the cosmos with the exception of certain parts of New Jersey—among people with more "normal" backgrounds. Which is also the reason I thought Torre's revelation of—and coming to terms with—a truly dark past seems a little superfluous. You do not need to have such a past to develop that kind of alienated behavior as a Filipino in America. But like I said, these are minor, and just quibbling.

Cesar Montano should stop complaining. If there is a milestone in Filipino moviemaking, it is not "Bagong Buwan," it is "Batang West Side." It ups the ante on quality, local movies that aspire for the moon henceforth having this to reckon with. If it isn't a runaway winner in next year's movie awards, I'll have the most serious doubts about the competence of our judges.

* * *

Comments are welcome at dequiros@vasia.com

Alarming laxity in explosives handling

POLITICAL TIDBITS

Belinda Olivares-Cunanan

WHEN I first heard the news about the slaying of Baron Cervantes, the former Army officer who was identified with the shadowy organization of military officers called the Young Officers Union (YOU), I was reminded of the episode in November 1986, when labor leader Rolando Olalia was killed along with his driver. The speculation then was elements of the RAM committed the double murders in an attempt to destabilize the Aquino administration, by riling up the Left against the rightist elements.

Like many other sectors, including President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo herself, I am tempted to theorize that the Cervantes killing was politically motivated and that he was killed for either or both of two reasons: to punish him for revealing an alleged coup plot against GMA or to rock the establishment and foment division especially among the young officers. On the other hand, it could have been caused by a personal fight the controversial officer had with a trigger-happy enemy.

* * *

The analogy to the Olalia killing fades when one considers that Cervantes did not command as much following as the labor leader. Yet it cannot be denied that the young officer was just as high profile and succeeded in penetrating the highest levels of officialdom. In fact, the last time I saw him he was at the impromptu celebration hosted by newly appointed Vice President Tito Guingona in his New Manila residence in March last year.

Cervantes was an articulate officer and that time he was talking about a long litany of complaints of the young officers. I imagined that he could be very convincing to the "civilians," but to this rather jaded and aging ex-military wife the complaints he relayed sounded more like the bleating of people who thought they were God's gift to this country and were forever plotting coups as though these were merely barn dances at Fort del Pilar. I thought to myself, these young officers spend more time complaining rather than doing any serious fighting and behaving like spoiled brats. At any rate, Cervantes' murder is a most condemnable act. They should get his murderers.

* * *

Sen. Gregorio Honasan should just wait for the ongoing investigation by the Armed Forces of the case of Navy Lt. Senior Grade Donn Anthony Miraflor and three other officials of the defunct PAOCTF, which was headed by his PMA classmate, Sen. Panfilo Lacson, instead of protesting their apprehension for keeping a huge cache of explosives. Honasan should remember that he is now a senator, not just the idolized leader of the RAM group, and his first duty is to the republic. He was quoted as saying he would initiate a Senate inquiry into the apprehension of Miraflor and company, who he claimed to be loyal to God and country. It's difficult to think of this group that way when these officers were found to have illegally hoarded a cache of explosives big enough to blow up the entire military establishment and thereby endangering the lives of countless soldiers and civilians.

Honasan makes no mention of the officers' many violations of military rules and the country's laws. He seems only concerned with saying what sounds good to his followers: that they are being used as "pawns" in a political war. But by seeking to preempt the AFP investigation, which is necessary, Honasan appears to be covering up for the former followers of Lacson. The more prudent thing to do is wait for the results of the official AFP investigation. Only if there is an attempt to whitewash the case or violate the human rights of the officers should he push for a Senate probe.

* * *

Surigao Rep. Prospero Pichay, chair of the House defense committee, was correct when he stressed that this hoarding of huge amount of explosives was a "serious national threat" and ought not to be taken lightly. At the very least, there should be an unimpeded, full-dress investigation of this episode. Higher authorities have a lot to answer for, such as, why there is such laxity in the handling of explosives and armory material, and securing them. This has always been a weakness of the defense and military establishment. Recall that Col. Victor Corpus, whose intelligence group cracked this case after some excellent sleuthing, himself led a successful raid on the PMA armory in the late 1960s before taking to the hills. Heads should roll in this case.

* * *

Few people quarreled with the choice of outgoing New York Mayor Rudy Guiliani as Time magazine's Person of the Year, for he symbolized the courage of the people of that city in facing up to the challenge of picking up the pieces of their shattered lives after the Sept. 11 bombings and rebuilding them. As Guiliani put it, he merely helped inspire confidence among the people at a time when they needed it so badly.

What needs to be redefined is Time's definition of the Person of the Year, as enunciated by its founder Henry Luce. Decades ago, Luce declared that the award would go to the person or persons who most affected the news or our lives, for good or for ill, in a given year. Obviously the person who fit this description for 2001 was Osama bin Laden, for it was he who influenced the course of events in the world not just in 2001 but perhaps forever. But as the magazine narrated, there was a big debate in the editorial staff about it and the overwhelming feeling was that the award couldn't go to Bin Laden.

Perhaps the criterion set by Luce, who couldn't have foreseen the events of Sept. 11, 2001, has to be changed. The Time award should go the man or woman who influences the course of events for the benefit of mankind in a certain year. Then there will be no quarrel over its choice.

* * *

At the Japanese ambassador's reception on the occasion of the Emperor's birthday three weeks back, I ran into an exceptional group, several National Artists chatting with former President Fidel V. Ramos. In the group were sculptor Billy Abueva, writer Frankie Sionil Jose and music awardee Jose Maceda. They represent the exclusive club of 9 or 10 National Artists still living.

I learned that each National Artist receives a monthly pension of P24,000 from the state in recognition of their exceptional achievements. However, Ramos pointed out that the amount was set during his term when the exchange rate was P26 to one dollar but now it's almost P52 to a dollar. That stipend has become woefully inadequate for them. The government ought to adjust the pension accordingly.

A sad tale and a winner

AT LARGE

Rina Jimenez-David

WHEN parents send their children to school, they do so with full confidence that not only will the children learn something useful to help them develop into productive citizens, but also that while in school, they will be kept safe from harm and looked after by their teachers and all the other adults in school.

Chuchie Quevedo See, an artist with the Sunday Inquirer Magazine, doubtless shared these same sentiments each day she bade her son John Robby farewell as he went off to school. But last Nov. 5, John Robby suffered an injury that was caused by a classmate inside the school premises. While relatively minor, the injury required extensive treatment and follow-up surgery. John Robby lost the nail in his right ring finger since the nail bed was scraped off, exposing the bone. A surgeon had to trim off part of the finger bone to close the wound. John Robby, who is only 14, will have to undergo surgery again when he turns 18, when the bone ceases to grow.

What Chuchie and her husband and the rest of the family want to know is: Who will take responsibility for the incident, and what do both the school and the classmate's parents intend to do to address the wrong done to their son?

"We already sent a letter addressed to the school and the parents of the student involved," writes Chuchie. In the letter, they demanded to be reimbursed for the following expenses:

- Hospital expenses amounting to P39,196.35 incurred from the time John Robby was admitted at the Makati Medical Center.
- Miscellaneous expenses incurred by John Robby as out-patient, such as medications at home, wound dressing, follow-up check up, etc.
- Expenses to be incurred on John Robby's second operation in the year 2005.

* * *

IN ADDITION, the family demanded to be furnished the following documents:

- **A written report from the school authorities to be made immediately.**
- **A copy of the report from E-Med (an emergency clinic inside the village).**
- **A written personal account of the incident to be made by:**

1. The P.E. teacher who was present at that time.

2. The resident nurse, on what happened in the six hours that John Robby was in her custody.

3. The students who witnessed the incident.

"We wanted full reimbursement of hospital expenses made immediately as soon as the original copies of the medical expenses were handed over to their office," adds Chuchie. "Each student at the Marymount School, BF Homes Parañaque is insured for P15,000. They had a check amounting to P14,000 ready on the third week after the incident. Now, who is going to pay for the rest? I believe that the parents of (the other student) should pay. Accident or not, they're liable. Unfortunately, I haven't heard from the parents since. Who can help parents like us follow up or mediate in this kind of situation?"

According to Chuchie, the parents of the other student know both their home number and cellphone number but to this day, she has yet to hear from them. Here's hoping this couple believes in the law of karma, for according to it, without taking a step toward restitution, what happened to John Robbie might well happen to their child.

* * *

FROM THIS story of woe, let's turn to a piece of good news.

At the recent 2001 Gawad Saka Award, the winner of the "Outstanding Corn Farmer" award was a farmer from South Cotabato. Jose F. Lorenzo, from Barangay Crossing Rubber in Tupi, says he owes his outstanding agricultural success to hard work and perseverance, the use of organic fertilizers, and higher yield varieties of seed corn.

Lorenzo was conferred the award after successfully harvesting a record 8,760 kilos of corn from a single hectare of agricultural land. The award, which is endowed by the Department of Agriculture each year, includes a gratuity of P25,000, aside from the rare distinction of being acknowledged as the most successful farmer in his category.

Lorenzo hails from Pangasinan, from where he, along with his parents, migrated to South Cotabato in the 1970s. He comes from a family of farmers, himself intending to pass the lore and work ethic of an agriculturist onto his own children.

* * *

THE AWARDEE attributed the high yield of produce from his farm to his choice of seed corn. Rather than using the traditional varieties that produce a modest amount of grain per plant and are subject to the ravages of nature, Lorenzo planted his fields with one of the new varieties of hybrid corn distributed by Pioneer Hi-Bred Philippines Inc.

The company selectively breeds corn strains to produce varieties that are perfectly suited to the climatic and environmental conditions in specific parts of the Philippines. Pioneer Hi-Bred also trained Lorenzo and other corn farmers in agricultural techniques and practices to ensure high yield and avert crop failure. Lorenzo says he was able to make a one-hectare plot produce the record 8.76 tons after having applied all he was taught by the seed company.

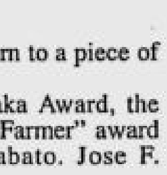
While the amount harvested was phenomenal, Lorenzo believes he can do even better in the future, possibly even producing up to 10 tons from a single hectare! He intends to use the P25,000 prize money from the Gawad Saka Award to further improve the productivity of the six hectares he currently tills.

Now that's what I'd really call good news!

Judgment in The Hague: stepping into 'the breach'

HUMAN FACE

Ma. Ceres P. Doyo



I HAVE written about this painful subject of military sexual slavery at least five times—in this column and as a long feature. I write about this again now to help bring closure to the wounds of the courageous women who came forward to set history straight and to warn the world, "Never again."

After more than half a century, vindication came at last to the so-called "comfort women" of World War II. On Dec. 3 to 4, 2001, the Women's International War Crimes Tribunal on Japan's Sexual Slavery held its concluding session in The Hague, The Netherlands, and rendered its final judgment.

It will be recalled that the most crucial sessions were held in December 2000 in Tokyo after which the tribunal already released its initial findings. I was there to cover that very emotional event.

Now, final judgment has been rendered at The Hague. The judgment summarizes everything that transpired during the Tokyo hearings as well as the documents, testimonies of victims, experts and witnesses and arguments of prosecutors, the names and crimes of the accused, the responsibility of the state and establishment of guilt. It will, no doubt, be an enduring classic historical, if not legal, document.

A Magnificat. After all of that have been said, the concluding paragraph caps it all with these words that shine and ring like a "Magnificat":

"Through this judgment, the judges wish to honor all the women victimized by Japan's military sexual slavery system. We recognize as well the great fortitude and dignity of the survivors who have reconstructed their lives and testified before us. The crimes committed against these survivors remain one of the great unremedied injustices of the Second World War.

"There are no museums, no graves for the unknown 'comfort women,' no education for future generations, and no judgment days, for the victims of Japan's military sexual slavery. Many of the women who have come forward to fight for justice have died unsung heroes. While the names inscribed in history's pages are often those of the men who commit the crimes, rather than the women that suffer then, this judgment bears the names of the survivors that took the stage to tell their stories, and thereby, for four days at least, put wrong on the scaffold and truth on the throne."

Guilty. Emperor Hirohito and nine named Japanese officials were found guilty of sexual slavery and rape which are considered crimes against humanity. Applying the laws of 1937 to 1945, the tribunal likewise found the government of Japan liable for harm inflicted by the Japanese military sexual slavery system and the continuing breach of its obligations resulting from the said system.

Among the tribunal's recommendations are: full acknowledgement by the Japanese government of its responsibility for the establishment of the "comfort women" system; compensation of victims and survivors; recognition of the honor of survivors through the creation of memorials and a museum; and establishment of mechanisms for thorough investigation of the system of military sexual slavery.

The former Allied Nations were also asked to declassify all military and government records concerning the establishment and operations of the "comfort stations" and the reasons it was not brought up before the International Tribunal for the Far East.

The judges who composed the tribunal were luminaries in international law. The presiding judge was Gabrielle Kirk MacDonald, former president of the United Nations ad hoc tribunal for Yugoslavia. The others were Argentina's Carmen Agribay, president of the International Association of Women Judges; United Kingdom's Christine Chinkin, a law professor of the University of London; and Kenya's Willy Mutunga, president of the Commission on Human Rights of his country.

But Tokyo 2000 was where and when the basis of the judgment in The Hague was established. There, prosecutors from 10 countries, including the Philippines (organized by the Asian Center for Women's Human Rights), charged the accused with sexual slavery and rape and the Japanese government for its state responsibility. About 75 survivors of sexual slavery and violence from Asia-Pacific countries (and also The Netherlands) braved the Tokyo winter chill to make their testimonies, spilling out the pain they had kept for more than 50 years so that the world would know. Experts, both Japanese and non-Japanese, shared their knowledge of the Japanese military structure, sexual violence in war as well as of international law.

Hounded by their guilty conscience, some former Japanese soldiers and officers even admitted participation in the atrocities committed against the women.

Documentary evidence consisting of written orders, photographs and film clips taken at that time were offered as proofs of the existence of "comfort stations" catering to the sexual appetites of the Japanese soldiers.

Stepping into "the breach." The tribunal has made declarations about its own nature thus: "This is a people's tribunal set up by the voices of global civil society.

"The authority for this tribunal comes not from a state or intergovernmental organization but from the peoples of the Asia-Pacific Region and, indeed, the peoples of the world to whom Japan owes a duty under international law to render account. Some will say this tribunal lacks due process guarantees. It cannot and does not purport to provide such guarantees. Further, this tribunal **steps into the breach left by states** and does not purport to replace their role. The power of the tribunal, like so many human rights initiatives, lies in its capacity to examine the evidence and develop an enduring historical record. In so doing, it is hoped to bring the government of Japan to recognize that the greatest shame lies in not admitting its full legal responsibility and providing redress."

This, indeed, is a triumph of civil society that dared step into "the breach." Congratulations to the women and men of peace and justice who made this possible.

Digital friendship

YOUNGBLOOD

Leila

*We want to know what the young are thinking about. What are their thoughts on current issues? We welcome contributions from the twentysomething and below.—**Ed.***

I HAVE just concluded a fleeting friendship.

I stumbled upon a 35-year-old burnt-out individual one Friday night through texting. It was actually my first time to exchange text messages with a stranger. (As a rule, I don't text a lot, even my closest friends.) I don't know why, but my first reaction when he asked about me was to put on my defenses, meaning I lied about who I was or what I did.

Throwing back the questions at him, I got a reply I refused to believe at first. He told me he was a member of the President's official family. Though I thought it odd that a man of his stature would bother to respond to a juvenile graphic message, my curiosity got the better of me. I opted to believe him anyway and allowed myself to be impressed by his credentials which he readily flaunted.

The next day, Saturday, I learned he was an active member of civil society and helped in the People Power Coalition's campaign during the last elections, which was probably how he earned his position in Malacannang. He revealed so much of himself in less than three hours. He sounded so real that already I felt guilty that I lied about myself.

It got worse when he tried to call me because "digital friendship is stale," according to him. I'm not good at lying and I didn't know how to take back what I already told him about myself so I declined to talk to him. I fumbled each time he called. He lost his temper when I cut his call twice. Thinking it was the end, I said goodbye.

But he deemed me "witty and an interesting species," and he wasted no time and apologized so we could resume our interrupted "digital friendship."

Sunday, we were more confident and trusting of each other. I hardly said anything about myself, to be safe, while he bravely disclosed his thoughts. He loved to talk while I eagerly listened.

He separated from his wife eight years ago and now lives with someone who is a bit older than he. He said he's happy especially if he sees people who suffer more than he does. I sensed a feeling of defeat in him. I wondered what kind of person, someone who is presumably well-off and powerful, would be "especially happy" to see people suffer more than he does; that seemed like the attitude of a man who didn't have much choice as to the kind of life that he could have. I sensed a feeling of defeat in him. He wished he could change certain aspects of his life, but said he couldn't.

I didn't know whether to pity or to admire him. I just felt that at that moment he needed to justify the decisions he had made through the years. More to convince himself than to get me on his side.

Jack was sweet, sensitive and funny. He made me laugh a lot those two days, and he stirred my curiosity. He said he was a very complex individual and I believed him. Judging from his texts, he could well be a poet or a writer. He sounded self-confident but there was a feeling of insecurity in him that I am not certain if he's aware of. He gamely revealed his thoughts and feelings. We texted endlessly that day with apparent disregard for the profits the cell-phone company was earning the past two days.

That night he said he had a "wonderful and hopeful weekend" because of me. (That hurt a bit: I'd been reduced to an instrument rather than a reason for his enjoyable evening.). Before finally retiring, he expressed interest in seeing me, or at least hearing from me again.

That night I realized I was being unfair to him because he was so honest while I couldn't even tell him that what kept me busy was Harry Potter and not a medical internship. I decided to confess the following day, Monday.

I thought he'd be furious, but instead he told me it was okay and not to worry. He even said he wanted to "pursue building a deeper foundation for our friendship in spite and because of our topical givens."

I suppose it was his way of getting back at me for lying to him because things were never the same again. He grew cold and insensitive. Suddenly he was too busy and refused to reply to my messages. All my efforts to undo the lies I told him were futile.

I've not heard from him again. It's like the friendship did not happen at all. I know I'll never meet him. Alas, I just have to hope that he gets interviewed or photographed by the Malacañang press corps so that I could get a glimpse of him either on TV or in the dailies.

How unfortunate that I have to learn a lesson the hard way. Our short-lived "digital friendship" taught me what I've always known but deliberately disregarded during those two days: Friendship, no matter what form it takes, must be built on honesty.

Leila, 29, works as a researcher in Quezon City

My choice

Nicole T. de Guzman

AN AMERICAN made me an offer recently: I will have the title of creative director in an apparently successful software/Web company based in the United States. The starting salary will be—get this—$1,300 monthly, and there will be frequent raises, complimentary equipment and Internet connection, plus shares of stock in the company. If I decide to move to America and work there, I will be getting a much higher pay—something like $8,000 monthly.

As we all well know, money talks. So I couldn't help but listen to him. Besides he was flattering me, telling me I was extraordinarily talented.

However as our negotiations progressed, I was slowly, inexorably turned off. For starters, based on our correspondence, I think he is a vermin of the first order. Despite my efforts to maintain a professional approach, he displayed an annoyingly high-strung attitude, which I found rather strange for a guy of his self-proclaimed experience and success. On several occasions within a span of one week, he changed his offer as frequently as I changed clothes. One day he would say one thing, and the next day, he would say something completely different. When I pointed this out to him, he would call me names and make subtle racial remarks, not even bothering to hide his mockery of my inclination to work here in the Philippines, rather than practically commuting to his country. (Who wants to be commuting by plane to America anyway?) "Land-locked" and "unrealistic" were the kindest terms he had for my attitude.

He made it clear that he thought this country is rotten, and anyone here should feel "blessed" to have an opportunity to leave. He repeatedly insisted that I immediately resign from my job, and when I hesitated, he kept at it, reminding me quite unnecessarily of how meager my salary was, especially if it was compared to what he was offering me. He was an insincere, immature fast talker who obviously had very little respect for non-Americans.

I told him on several occasions that if he found me difficult to talk with, he could hire someone else instead of virtually harassing me to accept an offer that I found distasteful and waving money and a title repeatedly to entice me. He did not.

When we were finally able to agree on the terms, we got into another argument over the pay. Suddenly, the $1,300 he was offering dwindled inexplicably to $1,100—still a relatively big amount, I admit, but why should I accept less than what was originally offered? When I stood my ground, he called me the "greedy one" and broke off the negotiations. Very professional behavior, indeed.

Even my lawyer said his attitude was extremely suspicious and distasteful. He advised me to stay away from him. I agree. No matter how much the compensation, I would never work for someone like him.

Do you know how much I am earning right now? Around a couple of hundred dollars a month. And I have to pay taxes, contribute to the Social Security System and pay for gas and my meals. I work from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m., every single weekday. It may take another year before I get a salary increase.

But you know what? I'm very happy with my job. I love the work. I love the teeny-weeny space, with my desk, my computer, my purple thingamajigs all over the place. Best of all, despite the modest salary and low position, I have great respect for the people I work with. They are dignified, hard-working, obviously well-bred and well-educated people.

Most of all, I love this country. Despite the heat, the traffic, the idiots in government, despite the poverty, this is my home. My family is here. My friends are here. My dog is here. Glorietta is here and so with the corner *sari-sari* store, hot *pandesal* in the morning, *adobo* sandwiches and *tiangges*. Everywhere I look, I see the familiar, comforting presence of other people who look, sound and think like I do: black hair, black eyes, a warm smile and a humble heart.

This is my world. This is my life. This my choice.

Nicole T. de Guzman, 22, is a Web designer and artist.

In IMF-WB care, RP remains sick

THIS is in reply to the letter of Ellen Cain, program officer for public governance of the Foundation for Economic Freedom last Dec. 28, 2001.

If a doctor has treated your child for an ailment for months and years, and he still doesn't get well, wouldn't you try another doctor and get a new prescription? Because of your blind faith in this glib-tongued, demonstrably incompetent doctor, would you condemn your child to a lifetime of infirmity?

The International Monetary Fund and its partner, the World Bank, have been the doctors of the Philippine economy for around 40 years. Under their treatment, our poor country has become universally known as the "perennially sick man" of Asia. And yet Cain would like our country to continue swallowing the failed IMF economic prescriptions.

What would you call this kind of attitude? Stupidity? Irresponsibility? Craziness?

What is even more deplorable is that most of our government bureaucrats, academicians, economists, "technocrats," Harvard and Wharton graduates, members of Congress, politicians, self-appointed "civil society" leaders and business partners of foreign corporations preach the same mantra of adherence to the IMF-WB philosophy. They have become the low and high priests of a quasi-religion. But while they have been rewarded with big salaries and high positions by the government, multinational corporations and by the IMF-WB (for their canine loyalty), the people they are supposed to serve wallow deeper in poverty.

In its 1998 report on poverty, the United Nations Development Program said the Philippines was the only country in South Asia that failed to reduce poverty in the past 20 years. In fact, according to the report, the number of poor families had increased from 4.53 million in 1994 to 4.55 million in 1997, just before the Asian financial crisis struck. Now, the number of poor Filipinos have increased, with those living below the poverty level rising from 36 percent to around 45 percent of the population.

At the same time, the same report revealed that the inequality of income has widened. In 1994, the richest 10 percent of Filipinos was only 19 times richer than the poorest 10 percent. In 1998, the gap widened to. 24 times.

In contrast, in the past 20 years, according to the UNDP, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand have been "remarkably" successful in reducing poverty. In 1996, according to an IMF paper by Philip Gerson, poverty incidence in the Philippines was 36 percent of the total population. In Indonesia it was 19 percent; Korea, 5 percent; Malaysia, 14 percent; and Thailand, 22 percent.

In all of Asia, the Philippines is the country most subservient to IMF-WB dictated policies. Yearly, the IMF reviews and approves our government's economic program, including the budget and tax policies. Our technocrats and Congress merely say "amen" to the IMF bureaucrats, who have no mandate from or any accountability to the Filipino public.

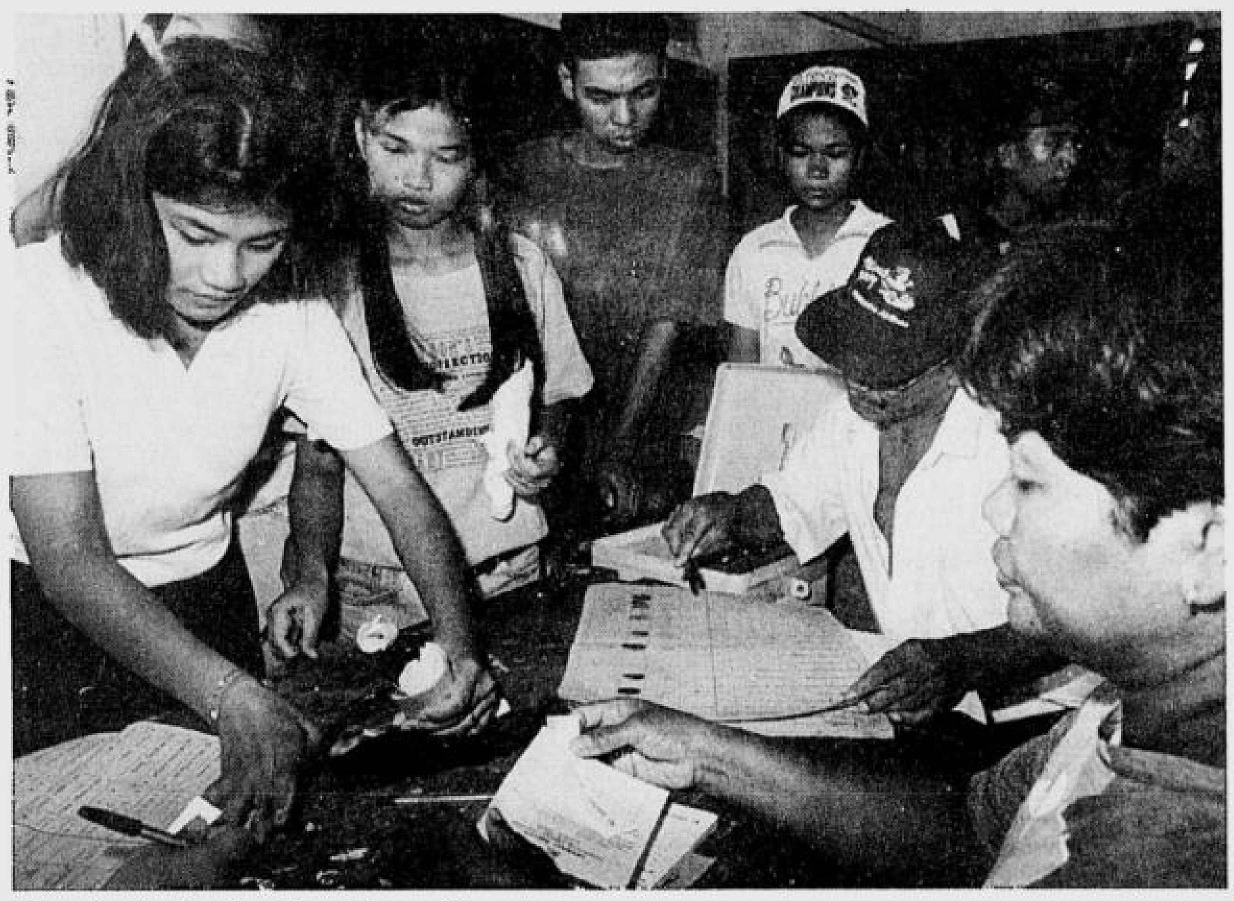
The poverty of the Filipinos is, of course, the result of our poor economic growth, which is the lowest in Southeast Asia. Our average economic growth rate of around 2.5 percent in the past 30 years is practically wiped out by the high population growth rate of 2.3 percent.

The highest economic growth rates in Asia have been achieved by the countries that are not noted for following IMF prescriptions. These include China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and even Indonesia. In the face of the current global recession, the biggest growth rates are being exhibited by China and Vietnam, both of which reject the IMF regime. Malaysia has imposed currency controls, contrary to the IMF's unsolicited advice. As a result, it has escaped many of the adverse effects of the 1997 financial crash. It is only now that it is experiencing a recession largely due to the US economic recession.

LETTERS

If the Philippines now exhibits a positive, albeit minimal growth, it is because it was already flattened in the 1997 crisis and even before that.

Learn truth from facts, said China's late leader Deng Xiaoping. Acknowledged as the architect of China's phenomenal economic growth, Deng was a college dropout. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad is a doctor, while Lee Kwan Yew, former prime minister of Singapore, is a lawyer. None of them studied in Harvard or Wharton or at the UP School of Economics, but all were highly successful in improving the economies of their countries. What they did was to do what was best for their countries, taking into account the experiences of other countries that had escaped from poverty, like Japan. They kept their own counsel, and exercised practical common sense.—**MANUEL F. ALMARIO, Project 6, Quezon City**



Pork to help fund polls

AS the Commission on Elections' budget for the next fiscal year is being reduced, the holding of barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections next year becomes doubtful.

For a country that is democratic and republican, elections are a necessity. Thus Congress should find ways to augment the Comelec's budget so that it can conduct orderly elections.

A possible solution to the financial problem is for legislators to allocate a fraction of their pork barrel to the Comelec. Their constituents have every right to be heard and they should be heard at least through elections.

Government officials should be able to make a distinction between necessary and discretionary expenditures. Elections are necessary.—**JACKSON L. UBIAS, BS Economics, School of Economics, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City**

A collective effort to improve movie industry

WHEN Cesar Montano went to the Metro Manila Film Fest (MMFF) awarding ceremonies, he was not in the right frame of mind.

The MMFF is a once-a-year opportunity for Philippine movies to dominate local theater venues. During the rest of the year, the local movie industry is crippled by competition from foreign films. Events such as this should be viewed as a collective effort to uplift the industry.

Awards are incidental. These are meant to recognize exemplary creative and technical achievements. These are not given to undermine non-winners. These are meant to encourage and challenge others to explore their creativity further.

Ideally, the main objective of filmmakers is to deliver messages which are socially relevant. How apt, real and effectively these messages are delivered are the basis of success or failure.

"Socially relevant" is how "Bagong Buwan" is hyped. The movie centers around the character Montano portrays: a Muslim doctor. He is educated and practicing his profession in Manila and he is detached from the struggles of his people, wavering in his commitment toward his people's plight, ambivalent about taking up arms to defend their right to dignity and life itself. Just the same, in the end, he is killed.

In a wider context, the movie sweeps through the issue of the disenfranchisement of our Muslim brethren and their principled resistance as well as the forces that wrought chaos on civilians' lives. It suggests that compassion alone can hold a nation together.

To a certain extent, despite a lack of depth in the treatment of people's issue, "Bagong Buwan" is socially relevant. This is definitely commendable. For now, this is enough for the Concerned Artists of the Philippines to sincerely congratulate all the winners of this year's MMFF.—**JULIE PO, secretary general, Concerned Artists of the Philippines, 65A 10th Avenue, Cubao, Quezon City**

A movie for the whole world to see

IN MY more than 35 years in the Philippines, this is my first letter to the editor about a movie. "Bagong Buwan," in my opinion, is a first-class film and deserves not only national acclaim but international recognition. The theme is most relevant for the Philippines at this time. The portrayal of Moro history, culture and the ongoing war in this country was done with sensitivity and mastery.

Marilou Diaz-Abaya and Margie Moran obviously did their homework. They researched carefully and they courageously showed the war with its painful realities. For a change, this movie helped the audience get a quality and respectful glimpse of individuals and families whose lives are so negatively affected by the long conflict. The development of the characters, including the relationships between Muslims and Christians, refugees, Moro Islamic Liberation Front rebels and government military, were so well done that the audience felt the horrors and cried with the players as the story continued. Perhaps the hope seeded throughout the film will move audiences, too.

The emphasis on and artistic use of oral history were a tribute to the producers and actors. The music and cinematography are likewise deserving of special mention for showing the reality of war's terrors and the awesome beauty of this country and its people.

The theme is all the more timely since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks in the United States. US President George W. Bush's war in Afghanistan is until now causing more deaths, hunger and destruction to millions of peace-loving and civilian Muslims in the Middle East: Most likely, it is also reinforcing and increasing the distorted view of Muslims and Arabs fostered by those who need to make enemies of persons and countries they cannot control or force to subscribe to so-called Western "democracy."

I hope "Bagong Buwan" will be shown all over the world with subtitles or dubbing in English, Chinese, Arabic, Russian, Spanish and other major languages. The whole world needs such a movie. The hope that it conveys by its title and throughout the film can do much to create a cultural readiness which can help build desperately needed peace, especially in the Philippines, the Middle East and Africa.—**SR. MARY GRENOUGH, MM, Maryknoll Sisters, UP Post Office Box 235, Diliman, Quezon City**

Are 'ukay-ukay' operators paying taxes?

THIS is in response to the letter of Roderick Pimentel published last Dec. 22.

I am from Baguio City and I am amazed by the stories about the *wagwagan*, or *ukay-ukay* as Manilans call it. It is true that these second-hand goods have factory defects and they were being sold at reasonable prices at first. But EIIB agents have been arresting some of the *wagwagan* operators who do not have the requisite business licenses.

In the middle of 2001, the stalls located in an old restaurant, a theater, some banks, a hotel, etc. shifted to *wagwagan* stalls for unknown reasons. Perhaps they were spared from payment of taxes. What are the Department of Trade and Industry and the Baguio mayor doing?

Pimentel's observations on these stalls are true: a pair of shoes can cost P3,500 but their owners don't pay taxes. We understand that the rentals for their stalls are very high. These should be looked into.—**WILLIAM CHAN, Aurora Hill, Baguio City**

Look who's talking

THIS is in reference to a letter published in your newspaper last Dec. 29.

It is only to be expected that Mike Pusing would harp on the accident involving Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority Chair Felicito Payumo's son. He will throw anything at Payumo at the order of his masters, the Gordons.

No, Payumo did not blame Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon for the incident. It was an accident that happened.

But the reaction from the Gordon camp was both petty and pathetic. While Payumo's immediate concern was for the safety of his son and his companions (he was thankful that no other vehicle was involved and that they did not sustain any serious injury), the Gordon camp's "text" campaign revolved around the damage to the vehicle and who would pay for it.

Tonito Payumo drove the vehicle that night because the assigned driver was not available. He should not have done so. He will have to pay for the damage.

But if the Gordons are concerned about the SBMA's property, how about explaining the P35-million hospital equipment, the ambulances, basket trucks and Pajeros they transferred to the City of Olongapo and for which Vice Mayor Cynthia Cajudo was suspended by the Sandiganbayan and former SBMA corporate secretary Hedy Esmani Diaz is facing charges and possible disbarment?

Or how about returning the Betacam and editing machine of the Media Relations Office for which poor Beth Marcelo, the former head, had to answer for it when in fact it was brought to Gordon's house after their rally and withdrawal from the SBMA in 1998?

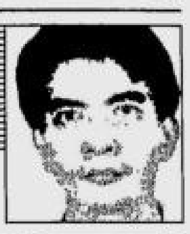
Or the scale model of the Commercial/Business District done by Kenzo Tange for the SBMA which is being kept at the Olongapo City Hall?

Or the P850-million disbursements Gordon made which the COA disallowed and for which he was recommended for dismissal by the Presidential Anti-Graft Committee under Chair Eufemio Domingo?

Doesn't it look like it is the Gordons who have a lot of explaining to do?—**REYNALDO M. GARCIA, department head, Media Relations Office, Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority, Bldg. 255, Barryman Road, Subic Bay Freeport Zone, Olongapo City**

Hard sell

PINOY KASI



Michael L. Tan

SOME time back in November, as we were taking lunch, a friend showed me a pile of brochures that had been thrust on her as she was walking through the mall to meet me. She frowned, complaining how annoying it was to have so many salespeople hanging around and "ambushing" people with their brochures and sales talk.

I couldn't agree more. I almost wrote up a column after the book fair in September to point out how the event had degenerated, mainly because of the many salespeople trying to get you to fill up raffle coupons, a ploy to get your attention so they could start trying to sell you stuff.

Many of these hard-sell tactics are legal but they can be annoying because they do have an element of coercion and deception. The raffle-coupon ploy, for example, isn't just an attempt to get your attention but also your name and phone number so sales representatives can call in.

A variation on the raffle-coupon tactic is the use of "surveys." I remember one "researcher" approaching me about two or three years ago in a mall and asking if she could ask a few questions about my travel and vacation patterns. A minute into the "survey interview," I could tell she wasn't a researcher and was really out to get my name, address and phone number, stuff which real survey researchers do not ask for. The "researcher" was actually trying to sell units in a time-share resort.

There are all kinds of marketing traps that have developed in the last few years, including mailed-in scams. The most common one involves a coupon entitling you to some free product. You show up at the shop and it turns out you get something free only if you buy some other over-priced product. The variations are endless and infuriating.

Many of these hard-sell tactics were first developed in Western countries but when they're transplanted in the Philippines, they become even more annoying because we have few legal safeguards to protect consumers.

They're also more irritating because with our cheap labor, the companies can hire entire armies of salespeople to hound consumers. Whether cheap Chinese goods in a *tiangge* or branded products in a swanky mall boutique, the market is actually quite saturated, so our economy is reduced to a system of hawkers trying to outdo each other with gimmicks.

Perhaps the most pathetic manifestation of this economic underdevelopment comes with agencies that "sell," well, marketing jobs. Listen to any AM radio station that features legal assistance and you'll find quite a number of complaints, each day, from people who have been victimized by these scams. These agencies put out ads promising you thousands of pesos each month by selling their products. Smooth operators, these agencies regale you with stories of other successful "account executives" (the latest euphemism for a salesperson) handling their products, which range from insurance policies to vitamins.

The catch is that to become an account executive, you have to go through a trial period where you sell a few thousand pesos worth of products. To fast-track their "membership," applicants often end up buying the products themselves. The "luckier" ones find themselves trapped in a network marketing scheme with few customers. Others are less fortunate and find out, too late, that the insurance policies are fake, or that they're stuck with shoddy products that break down within a few days. When they try to get a refund, the agency representatives shrug their shoulders, "Sorry, nothing we can do."

What's so obscene about these scams is that they prey on the most vulnerable: the poor and the unemployed, especially, and older people. One time I told a sales agent who was hounding my mother with phone calls that he was behaving like a bully.

Being soft-hearted, I ended up feeling very guilty afterwards because I know many of these salespersons are themselves quite hard-up and have no choice but to try to meet their quotas. Everything still boils down to an anemic economy, with a terrible dearth of economic opportunities.

I couldn't help thinking about the differences having been in China and Taiwan just recently. In China, you are besieged constantly by touters and hawkers, dragging you into their stores with promises of discounts. Bargaining isn't fun but a necessary survival tactic (I once haggled with a store owner to bring down the price of an "antique" ceramic piece from an equivalent of P200 down to P16, only to find the same piece the next day in a small village, selling for about P3). The Chinese business adage of *kai gao mai di* literally translates as "start high, sell low" but I've always felt that it can also mean *caveat emptor* (buyers beware) in large bold print with several exclamation points.

All that contrasts with Taiwan, where a discount of 10 or 20 percent is as much as you can go, even with street vendors. Walking away, which in mainland China brings vendors running after you and agreeing to your last offer, doesn't work in Taiwan. The differences are all too clear: there's a bit more "rationality" in Taiwan's business scene, with both vendors and sellers knowing what a product's value is. The vendors, too, aren't quite as desperate as those in mainland China, or in the Philippines.

It's been said that all you need in marketing is guts. That has to change. Many people, including myself, will walk away from a shop the minute a salesperson starts to use pressure tactics. Our business schools need to teach our students that they eventually build a pool of steady clients when people know they can get high quality products at a good price and, yes, with a bit of honest sales talk.

* * *

Comments to miguel@pinoykasi.net

Anti-union extra bonus in labor department

THIS is to clarify news stories appearing in some newspapers on the extra Christmas bonus received by the employees of the Department of Labor and Employment.

Secretary Patricia Sto. Tomas issued Administrative Order No. 287 dated Dec. 5, 2001, authorizing the release of an extra Christmas bonus for all DOLE employees in the amount of P5,000. This was based on a presidential directive contained in a Cabinet circular to all department heads allowing the grant of an extra Christmas bonus to be funded from agency savings.

It is true that every employee of the DOLE received P5,000 each. What Sto. Tomas was silent about and what we are protesting is the provision explaining that non-union members would be receiving P5,000 as extra Christmas bonus while union members would be getting P2,000 as extra bonus and P3,000 as partial payment to the P6,000 signing bonus.

The signing bonus of P6,000 is one of the provisions of the Collective Negotiation Agreement (CNA) signed between the management and the DOLE Employees Union last Sept. 8, 2000 which took effect last year. A signing bonus is a symbol of goodwill given to union members when parties conclude a CNA, which is the counterpart of the Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in the private sector.

In a press statement issued last Dec. 16, Labor Assistant Secretary Benedicto Bitonio Jr. stated that "a signing bonus arising from the CNA has not become a demandable right" and "neither would it be equitable for non-union members to get less additional cash benefit when this benefit is actually funded from the same source…"

This sentiment is clearly anti-union and not befitting an official of the DOLE. This position taken by DOLE officials reflects how they view the rights and benefits won by the union in their negotiations with management. It also reflects their sentiment on the rights of workers in the private sector. This means that management's dealing with the union through the CNA and other legal and recognized processes was a farce all along, a way to placate and deceive the union in order to diminish its militancy.

Sto. Tomas claims she has not committed unfair labor practice or union-busting by giving a bigger bonus to non-union members because AO 287 was issued in the name of fairness. Where is fairness when union members are given less than non-union members? It is an act tantamount to favoring and granting better benefits to non-union members so that employees will be discouraged from joining and participating in the activities of the union. It is an act that smacks of union-busting and unfair labor practice.—**JOSE GLEN I. TRAMPE, national president, DOLE-EU-Courage**

The WORLD

LUVERNE B. GUECO, EDITOR

Leftist senator latest Argentine president

BUENOS AIRES—A left-wing senator became Argentina's fifth president in two weeks, pledging to ditch free-market policies that he said had left Argentina "without a peso." Thousands of protesters banged pots in the streets early Wednesday to demand a popular election.

DEMONSTRATORS throw stones at Duhalde's supporters outside Congress. AP

Eduardo Duhalde, a 60-year-old former vice president and two-term governor of the country's richest province, Buenos Aires, was chosen to serve out the term of his unpopular predecessor, Fernando de la Rua, through December 2003.

His election was confirmed by 262 lawmakers with 21 against and 18 abstentions in a marathon session of Congress late Tuesday. The legislators also scuttled earlier plans for a March presidential election, sparking a large but peaceful street protest early Wednesday.

"Elections now!" thousands of pot-banging demonstrators chanted as they swarmed onto the capital's streets to demand a popular election. The protest flickered peacefully off and on through the night, with lines of riot police still cautiously watching over dozens of noisy protesters when first light hit the city Wednesday morning.

Duhalde has the unenviable task of calming an Argentine public reeling from a four-year recession and a country unable to pay its $132-billion public debt.

Now confronting the country's most serious political and economic crisis in decades, the new president from Argentina's largest party lashed out at free market policies he blames for the country's economic woes.

Duhalde was to don the blue-and-white presidential sash in a noon ceremony Wednesday, followed by a flurry of announcements of Cabinet positions and economic policies.

Duhalde's task is gargantuan: Industry is crippled and uncompetitive, thanks to an overvalued currency and rigid labor laws.

Unemployment has spiraled to near-record levels, topping 18 percent, pushing thousands of Argentine families—many used to near-European living standards—into abject poverty.

Duhalde becomes the fifth president to take office in two weeks in this economically crippled South American nation of 36 million people. On Dec. 21, De la Rua was ousted by street violence resulting from his belt-tightening policies.

Since then, two interim presidents have briefly taken the helm. A more permanent caretaker president, Adolfo Rodriguez Saa, was to shepherd Argentina through to the March elections, but he resigned Sunday amid fresh street protests—just a week into office.

Although from the Peronist Party that dominates Congress, Rodriguez Saa failed to secure support from warring party factions for his plan to create one million jobs with a public works program and to kick-start the stalled economy with an extra currency alongside the peso and the US dollar—both widely used here.

A veteran of the populist left-wing of the Peronists, Duhalde gave few clues to concrete policies for saving Argentina from bankruptcy and staving off a slide into social chaos and anarchy.

But the tone he set was clear: The new Argentina would stand against unbound free market economics, and against kowtowing to international banking and finance.

"The financial crisis is without precedent," he said. "We have been left today without a peso."

"My commitment, starting from today, is to do away with an exhausted economic model . . . and to lay the foundations of a new model that can help our market recover and ensure a better distribution of wealth," he said, winning a standing ovation from lawmakers.

Duhalde promised "a program of national salvation" to restore the peace, vowed to uphold his predecessor's pledge to create one million new jobs and a social safety net for the unemployed.

Mindful of the enraged protests of the normally docile middle class that evicted De la Rua from office, Duhalde also pledged to protect Argentines' savings. His unpopular predecessor had limited weekly cash withdrawals to $250 in a Dec. 1 clampdown.

Duhalde, who ran second to De la Rua in a 1999 election, has been a fierce critic of Argentina's last decade of free-market reforms that—like elsewhere in Latin America—brought growth, but often failed to close the gap between the few rich and the legions of poor.

But Duhalde's province, home to a third of Argentina's 36 million people, racked up millions of dollars in debt under his administration.

Martin Redrado, chief economist of the Buenos Aires think-tank, Fundacion Capital, said Duhalde's economic plan had been "a leap into the unknown."

"I think he will move Argentina toward a more protectionist economy . . . away from free market policies we have seen in last 10 years," said Redrado. "We are talking about a shift."

After nearly four years of recession, Argentina is in its worst crisis since the interruption of democracy by a 1976-83 military dictatorship. The restoration of democracy sent the military back to the barracks and left Argentina's political elite to feud for power.

So far, there have been no rumblings from the military in the current crisis. *AP*

DUHALDE: A lifelong ambition fulfilled AP

Populist, old-school political boss is back

BUENOS AIRES—Two years is a long time in Argentine politics: In October 1999, Peronist Eduardo Duhalde suffered the worst setback of a long political career, losing to Fernando de la Rua in a presidential race that ended Peronism's decade-long grip on power.

On Tuesday, Congress appointed Duhalde as the fifth president in two weeks amid one of the worst economic crises in decades to form a caretaker government for a country on the brink of social chaos.

Losing the 1999 presidential race struck a stinging blow to Duhalde, who had never lost an election and who had served in two of Argentina's most powerful positions: vice president and governor of Buenos Aires province.

Now 26 months later, one of Argentina's most powerful political bosses is back.

Amid cheering in Congress, Duhalde took the presidency to fill out De la Rua's term ending in December 2003. De la Rua resigned last Dec. 21, after days of rioting forced him from power midway through a four-year term.

For Duhalde, a 60-year-old senator and Peronist party boss, becoming president fulfills a lifelong ambition. Still, even Duhalde has an unenviable challenge: imposing effective government on a country adrift in a searing crisis that is by turns economic, political and social.

Argentines are clamoring for change, and Duhalde certainly represents a break with the recent past: A populist, old-school political boss who spent his life building a power base within the Peronist party, Duhalde stands in stark contrast to the dry, technocrat De la Rua.

Where De la Rua and his predecessor, Carlos Menem, espoused free-market policies such as privatizing state industry and opening Argentina's long-protected economy to the world, Duhalde has spent years laying into authorities for their "neo-liberal" ways.

Duhalde, who was Menem's vice president between 1989-91, left to run for Buenos Aires provincial government. He twice won election as governor of the province, Argentina's most politically influential and home to a third of the country's 36 million people.

Born in October 1941 in Lomas de Zamora, just outside of the capital, Duhalde was a talented student, who earned his law degree from the prestigious University of Buenos Aires. During his university years, he made his first foray into politics. *AP*

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Thursday, January 3, 2002
Week Before Epiphany

1st Reading: **1 Jn 2:29–3:6**
Gospel: **Jn 1:29-34**

When John saw Jesus coming towards him he said, "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. It is he of whom I said: A man comes after me who is already ahead of me, for he was before me. I myself did not know him, but I came baptizing to prepare for him, so that he might be revealed in Israel."

And John also gave this testimony, "I saw the Spirit coming down on him like a dove from heaven and resting on him. I myself did not know him but God who sent me to baptize told me: 'You will see the Spirit coming down and resting on the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' Yes, I have seen! and I declare that this is the Chosen One of God."

Commentary

John continues his mission of witnessing to Jesus. "Fix your eyes on Jesus, God's lamb, who will offer his life in sacrifice for our healing." John is a good companion, for he too is searching for Jesus. "I did not know him myself," he admits, "and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptizing with water." As disciples of Jesus we can say the same – we want to make him known to others yet we ourselves need to know him better. John invites us to contemplate Jesus at his baptism, watch the Spirit rest upon Jesus like a dove, and hear the divine call to listen to Jesus as God's chosen one, chosen to reveal the truth and loving kindness of God.

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SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

REMEDIAL LAW (CRIMINAL PROCEDURE/EVIDENCE)—Principles in reviewing convictions in rape cases—In reviewing convictions for rape, this Court has been guided by the following principles: (1) that an accusation for rape is easy to make, difficult to prove, and even more difficult to disprove; (2) that in view of the intrinsic nature of the crime, where only two persons are usually involved, the testimony of the complainant must be scrutinized with utmost caution; and (3) that the evidence for the prosecution must stand on its own merits and cannot draw strength from the weakness of the evidence of the defense. The Court has carefully gone over the records of these cases and finds nothing to justify a reversal of the trial court's findings. The prosecution was able to prove all the elements of rape committed through force or intimidation. [Citations omitted.] [Justice Mendoza, *En Banc*, People v. Gonzales, G.R. Nos. 139445-46, June 20, 2001]

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2 rivals hope talks would ease tensions

ISLAMABAD—As their foreign ministers headed for a regional meeting Wednesday, India and Pakistan both hinted at diplomatic contact to ease the disharmony that has pushed thousands of troops toward their shared frontier and thousands of frightened residents away from it.

Abdul Sattar and Jaswant Singh, the Pakistani and Indian foreign ministers, will be seated at the same table in Katmandu, Nepal, where a meeting of South Asian nations is convening. Their bosses, President Gen. Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, arrive Friday.

"I have no confirmation as yet of a meeting," Singh said Tuesday night, asked about the chance of a meeting with Sattar. But he would not rule it out, even though a Vajpayee spokesperson said earlier that no meetings were planned "at any level."

Pakistan has said repeatedly it would be willing to meet with India and that tension should be defused through talks. Sattar suggested Pakistan would consider extraditing terrorism suspects if India met "legal requirements," The Nation newspaper reported Wednesday.

The South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation meeting is particularly pivotal because it offers the possibility of direct diplomatic contact between the two nations, which has been scarce of late. Last week, India sent home half of Pakistan's diplomats, and Pakistan responded in kind.

Relations between Pakistan and India, always tense, worsened markedly after suicide attackers stormed the Indian Parliament on Dec. 13. Fourteen people, including five attackers, were killed in what India said was an attack orchestrated by Lashkar-y-Tayyaba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, two Pakistani-backed militant groups fighting against India's rule of the disputed Kashmir region.

Pakistan denies the charges and says India's demands to arrest militants can be answered only if New Delhi provides credible proof. India this week handed Pakistan a list of 20 suspected terrorists.

"We will certainly take action when evidence is provided," foreign ministry spokesperson Aziz Ahmed Khan said.

Still, in recent days Pakistan has acted to arrest dozens of militants, including the former leader of Lashkar-y-Tayyaba, though it attributed the arrests to internal security, not India's demands.

India is insisting Islamabad take what New Delhi calls "meaningful and resolute steps" to stop terrorists based in Pakistan from carrying out acts of violence in Kashmir, a mountainous region over which the two countries have fought two wars.

"The issue of cross-border terrorism directed against India has to be effectively addressed by Pakistan," Nirupama Rao, India's foreign ministry spokesperson, said in Katmandu on Tuesday.

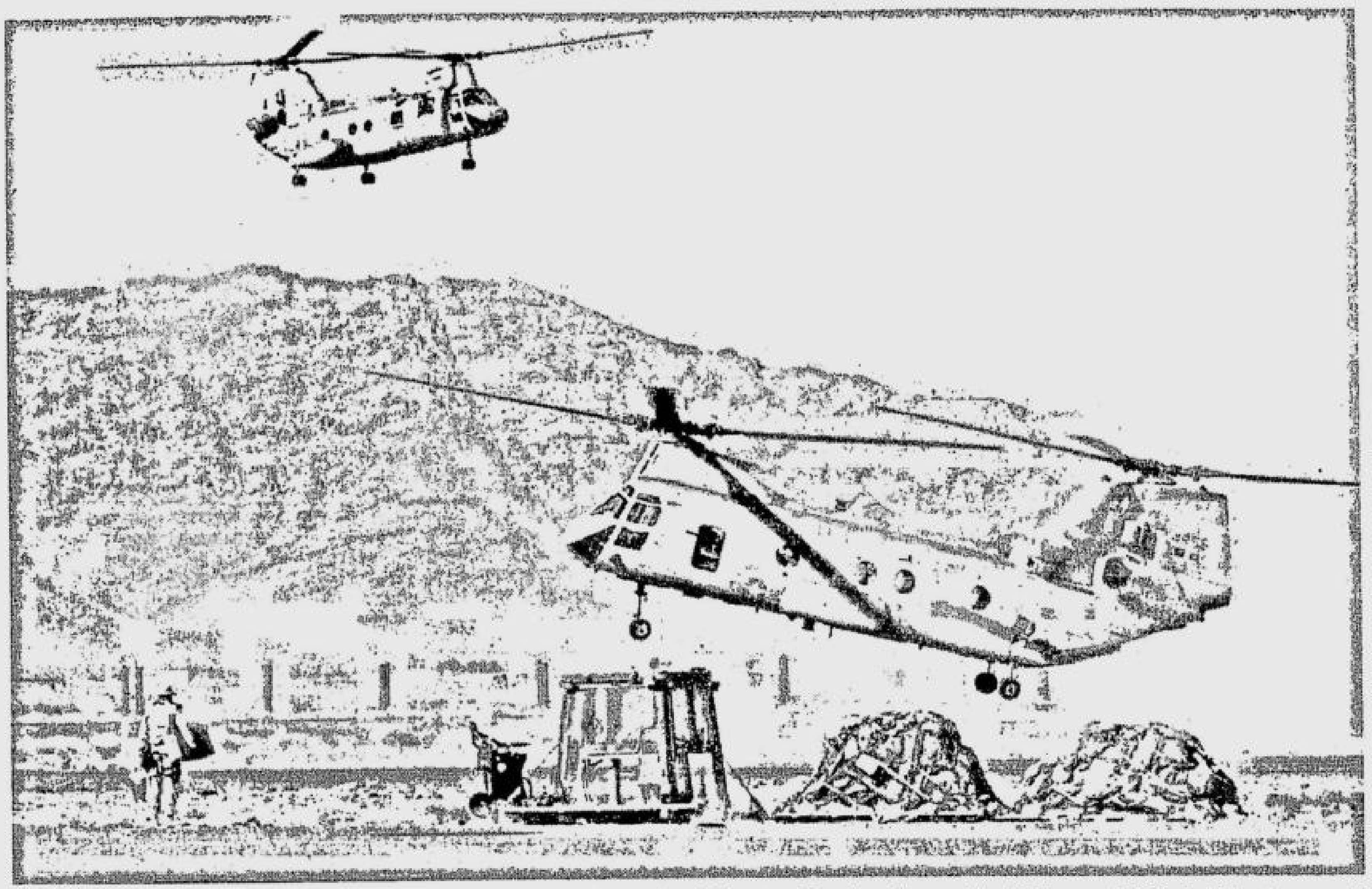
Mindful of the danger involved in a dispute between South Asia's only nuclear powers, the world has been paying attention.

China has expressed alarm. The United States has been on the phone almost daily with Musharraf and Vajpayee. And on Tuesday night, Pakistan said British Prime Minister Tony Blair will visit Islamabad next Monday to discuss the tensions.

In southern Kashmir early Wednesday, Indian and Pakistani soldiers traded mortar and small-arms fire across the disputed border—a more intense version of what is a common occurrence even in calmer times.

Security officials reported an intense exchange of fire in the Rawalakot and Bhimber sectors, where villagers living near the frontier continued to relocate. More than 19,000 Pakistani Kashmiris have fled the border since mid-December.

"People are afraid and expect the intensity of fighting to rise," said Sardar Mohammed Zafeer, a resident of the border town of Abbaspur. He spoke to The Associated Press by telephone Wednesday morning. *AP*



TWO CH-46 Sea Knights land at the Marine's base at Kandahar International Airport on Tuesday after a raid on Taliban and al-Qiada hideouts. AP

US-backed Afghan forces close in on village where Omar is hiding

KABUL—US-backed Afghan forces vying for the honor of capturing fugitive Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar gathered in southern Afghanistan to march on a mountain village where he was believed to be holed up.

In the Afghan capital Kabul, a reconnaissance team from 12 nations contributing to an international security force that will work with the interim government in the city arrived on Wednesday to assess the needs on the ground.

The intelligence chief in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar, Haji Gullalai, said on Tuesday as many as 2,000 fighters were closing in on Mullah Omar and die-hard Taliban fighters who may be protecting him.

"We have two goals: To disarm irresponsible people and to get Omar, who is a criminal for the Afghan people and the whole world," he said.

An official working for Gullalai said on Wednesday negotiations were under way to try to capture Omar without bloodshed.

"We are still in contact with the people there to find a way to end this issue peacefully," he said. "I think we can achieve this goal through dialogue and discussion."

Mullah Omar, protector of Osama bin Laden and second only to Bin Laden on Washington's wanted list, is thought to be in a village near the town of Baghran in Helmand province, 160 km northwest of Kandahar.

The United States blames Bin Laden for the Sept. 11 attacks that killed more than 3,000 American and other nationals in New York, Washington and on a crashed plane in Pennsylvania.

US troops are still searching for Bin Laden, who is believed to be in eastern Afghanistan or across the border in Pakistan. They are also gathering intelligence information left behind by his al-Qaida network.

US Marines scoured a compound in Helmand province on Tuesday, according to the US Central Command, which said they were not directly taking part in the hunt for Mullah Omar.

The Marines, who left their Kandahar base in a pre-dawn convoy with helicopter gunship support, searched buildings thought to have been used by al-Qaida and Taliban fighters.

Navy Commander Dan Keesee, a Central Command spokesperson, said the Marines were hunting for information that could be used in current or future operations against al-Qaida or Taliban forces.

"Their mission is not affiliated with any ongoing search for Mullah Omar or Osama bin Laden," he said.

Earlier reports suggested Marines may have been preparing to support Afghan allies in an assault on the village near Baghran.

Elsewhere, anger simmered in Afghanistan over US bombing since the overthrow of the Taliban and the rout of the al-Qaida terrorist network. *Reuters*

Hot winds fan more wildfires

SYDNEY—Hot, dry and swirling winds fanned more than 100 bush fires out of control and smoke clouds towered over Australia's largest city on Wednesday as angry officials vowed to punish arsonists, many of them children.

At least half of the wildfires have been deliberately lit since the crisis started 10 days ago, police said.

Thousands of residents fled their homes as separate blazes joined and formed several massive fire fronts that totaled about 2,000 km in length.

About 20,000 firefighters were stretched to their limit by the wild weather.

Hundreds of reinforcements were being flown in from other Australian states and neighboring New Zealand.

At least 21 arson suspects, including 14 children, have been arrested and police were searching for others. The seven adult suspects face a maximum penalty of 14 years in prison if convicted. *AP*

Man charged in Sept. 11 plot expected to plead not guilty

ALEXANDRIA, Virginia—Zacarias Moussaoui, the first individual charged as an accomplice in the Sept. 11 attacks, has decided to plead innocent to charges that he conspired to kill and maim thousands of victims, his lawyer said.

"We will be entering a plea of not guilty to all of the charges in the indictment," public defender Frank Dunham, one of three defense attorneys, said prior to Moussaoui's arraignment Wednesday in US District Court, where security was expected to be extraordinarily heavy.

At least a dozen US marshals were in the courtroom on Dec. 19 when Moussaoui, who had just been transferred from detention in New York, appeared before a federal magistrate to hear the charges against him read. Security personnel also ringed the federal court building.

If convicted, four charges in the six-count indictment could result in Moussaoui's execution, and US District Judge Leonie Brinkema set a March 29 deadline for prosecutors to decide whether they would seek the death penalty.

Moussaoui's mother, Aicha el-Wafi, came to the United States from France last week and said her son had told her he could prove his innocence. The defendant, 33, is a French citizen of Moroccan descent who received a master's degree in England.

Although Moussaoui has been in federal custody on immigration charges since August, when he aroused suspicions at a Minnesota flight school, the indictment says he had conspired with the Sept. 11 hijackers to kill and maim victims in the United States. While accusing him of links to Osama bin Laden's terrorist network, the indictment does not specifically explain his role in the terror attacks.

Nonetheless, Attorney General John Ashcroft called Moussaoui an "active participant" with the 19 hijackers who crashed four jetliners in New York, Washington and western Pennsylvania, killing more than 5,000 people.

The indictment accuses Moussaoui of pursuing some of the same activities as the hijackers, by taking flight training in the United States, inquiring about crop dusting and purchasing flight-deck training videos.

The indictment also said Moussaoui had received money in July and August from Ramzi Bin al-Shibh, an alleged member of a German terrorist cell who was a roommate of Mohammed Atta, the suspected ringleader in the attacks. The FBI says it believes Bin al-Shibh may have been planning to be the 20th hijacker. *AFP*

Bloomberg announces cuts, urges sacrifice

NEW YORK—Saying belt-tightening was needed to overcome the city's fiscal problems, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced plans to cut his office staff by 20 percent and challenged other officials to do the same.

During his inauguration speech on Tuesday, the billionaire businessman issued a call for shared sacrifice, but he pledged to avoid tax increases and to work to keep businesses in the city as they struggle in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

"We will not be able to afford all that we want," he said. "We will not even be able to afford everything we currently have."

The 59-year-old political novice enters office faced with three consecutive years of budget gaps greater than $3 billion, an underperforming 1.1-million student school system and a citizenry still jittery from the terrorist attack, subsequent anthrax attacks and countless false alarms.

Bloomberg said he would follow through on his campaign promise to make education and affordable housing top priorities, and also suggested he may find room in the budget for former Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's $1.6-billion plan to build new baseball stadiums for the New York Mets and New York Yankees.

"Even though we must sacrifice now, let us not forget we are still a city of big dreams, big ideas, big projects and a big heart," he said. "We will bring new life to our waterfront and stimulate new investment in housing, schools, and when we can afford them, the world's best cultural and athletic facilities."

But Bloomberg challenged the city council, the public advocate, the comptroller and the borough presidents to reduce their staffs by 20 percent, a proposal met with scattered boos from the politically connected audience outside City Hall.

"We cannot ask of others what we are not willing to do ourselves," Bloomberg declared.

The new mayor's task is even more daunting because Bloomberg, who made his fortune on Wall Street and from Bloomberg L.P.—the financial information company he founded—has never held public office. *AP*

CHARLOTTE Bloomberg reaches up to kiss her son, Michael, following his inaugural address as the 108th mayor of New York. AP

WORLDBRIEFS

Disagreement over speech

JERUSALEM—Prime Minister Ariel Sharon on Tuesday vetoed a plan by Israel's president to speak to the Palestinian parliament, sparking a public disagreement over what sort of gestures Israel should make with Mideast violence on the decline. Moshe Katsav, Israel's low-key president, wanted to address the Palestinian legislators in the West Bank town of Ramallah and propose a yearlong ceasefire that would end 15 months of fighting. However, Katsav's post is largely ceremonial, and he rarely get involved in the nitty-gritty of policymaking. The proposed address would have put him in the political spotlight, and comes at a time when Israelis and Palestinians are both holding internal debates about what sort of moves to make to end the cycle of confrontation. *AP*

Colombia rebels attack 6 towns

BOGOTA, Colombia—Guerrilla fighters waged scattered attacks over the New Year holiday, leaving 13 people dead on the eve of peace talks, officials said Tuesday. Among those killed were eight soldiers who died when they crossed a mine field. Delegates from the leftist Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—the country's main rebel army, also known as the FARC—and President Andres Pastrana's government are scheduled to meet Thursday in an effort to get ceasefire talks under way. The FARC and another leftist group have been fighting the government and an outlawed right-wing paramilitary group for control of Colombia for nearly four decades. *AP*

Zambia judge rejects appeal

LUSAKA, Zambia—A high court judge ruled Zambia's new president could be declared and inaugurated Wednesday, rejecting an opposition appeal that no winner be named until allegations the ruling party rigged the vote were investigated. The move paved the way for ruling party candidate Levy Mwanawasa to take power. According to projected election results he commands a narrow lead over opposition contender Anderson Mazoka. High Court Judge Peter Chitengi ruled that the petition filed by seven opposition parties was "premature" and that the high court had no jurisdiction to bar the government from declaring a winner. Chitengi said the opposition parties could only contest the findings of the election after the new president was sworn in. According to the Constitution, he said, only a hearing by all seven Supreme Court justices could determine if the elections were free and fair. Opposition party leaders claim the ruling Movement for Multiparty Democracy stuffed ballot boxes and tampered with vote counting. *AP*

Kim Jong-il's top goal

SEOUL—South Korea's unification minister said Wednesday that the realization of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il's promised visit to Seoul is his government's "maximum goal" in relations with the communist North in 2002. Hong Soon-young, the Seoul government's point man on North Korea, said, however, that he was not certain whether the goal could be achieved in the new year. "Defense Commission Chair Kim Jong-il's return visit is our maximum goal to achieve for this year but for now, I can't be optimistic or certain about it," Hong told a new year meeting with his ministry officials. Kim Jong-il took power after his father and president, Kim Il-sung, died in 1994. He has since been ruling the reclusive North as chair of the National Defense Committee, a powerful party organization that controls the country's 1.1-million-member military. Hong said a visit by the North Korean leader to the South would contribute to peaceful coexistence of the neighbors, a goal set in the first inter-Korean summit in June, 2000, when South Korean President Kim Dae-jung traveled to the North's capital, Pyongyang. *AP*

Anwar's final appeal

KUALA LUMPUR—Malaysia's highest court on Wednesday set Jan. 14 to hear the final appeal of former deputy premier Anwar Ibrahim against his conviction and six-year prison sentence for corruption, Anwar's lawyer said. Officials at the Kuala Lumpur Federal Court faxed a notice to Sankara Nair informing Anwar's defense team to prepare for the hearings—the jailed politician's last legal avenue to appeal the conviction and sentence. The court was supposed to hear the appeal last November, but proceedings were postponed after a judge fell ill and was hospitalized. Nair said he would ask for a five-judge panel—instead of the usual three—to conduct the appeal. It would mark Anwar's first major court appearance in more than a year. *AP*

Youngest Suharto son sought to buy pardon

JAKARTA—The youngest son of former Indonesian dictator Suharto tried to buy a presidential pardon for almost $2 million to escape charges of corruption, his lawyer said Wednesday.

Lawyer Elza Syarief admitted that Hutomo "Tommy" Mandala Putra had handed over almost $2 million to two men said to be close to former president Abdurrahman Wahid in October 2000.

"Yes, he paid the sum to Dodi Sumadi and Abdullah Sidiq Muin in his effort to get a presidential clemency," Syarief said.

The money was handed over during a meeting at a posh hotel in Central Jakarta after the Supreme Court overruled Tommy's acquittals by two lower courts in the multimillion-dollar graft case and ordered him jailed.

She declined to give further details saying police were still investigating Tommy's claim. Sumadi and Muin have both denied receiving any money.

Wahid, who turned down the plea for clemency, has also repeatedly denied that he got any money from Tommy.

Tommy, the youngest son of former president Suharto, failed to turn himself in to serve the 18-month jail term on Nov. 3, 2000 and went underground.

TOMMY SUHARTO

His months on the run came to an end on Nov. 28 last year when police arrested him in a south Jakarta house.

While he was still on the run, a panel of the Supreme Court in a controversial verdict, acquitted Tommy of the graft charges.

But police have said Tommy is being detained under suspicion of having commissioned the murder of the Supreme Court judge who ordered his jail term in September 2000.

Tommy is also being questioned on suspicion of possessing illegal weapons, munitions and explosives following the discovery of arms caches in a Jakarta house and an apartment where he allegedly stayed during his months on the run.

Police said they were also questioning him for a possible hand in a series of bombings in Jakarta last year. *AFP*

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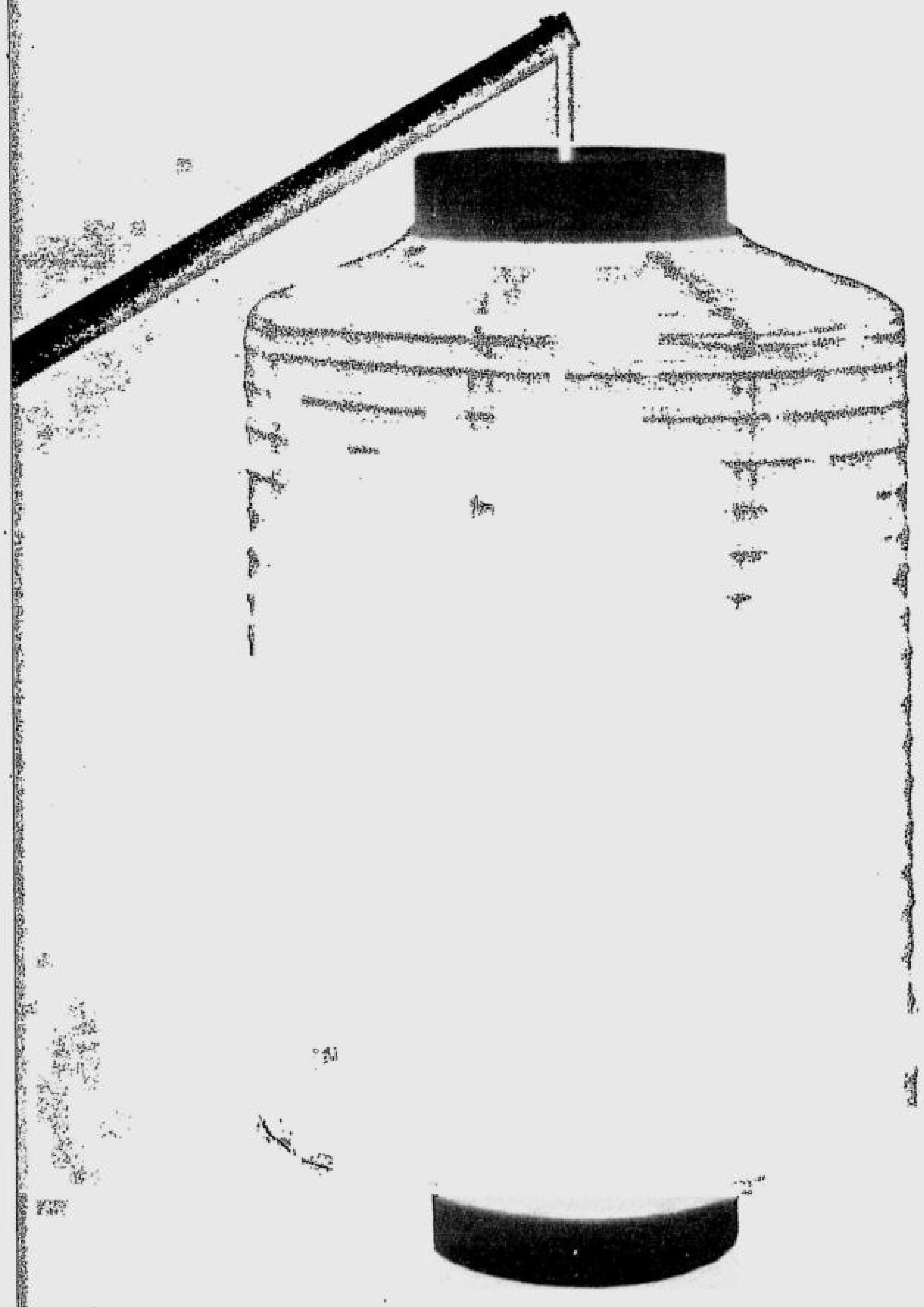
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Man sent to jail after New Year assault on bishop

BACOLOD CITY—A commotion occurred at the San Sebastian Cathedral early Tuesday when a mentally-deranged man made a grab for Bishop Vicente Navarra, who was officiating the New Year's Mass.

Ronnie Jaranilla Muñez went near the altar and grabbed the prelate's vestment before he was pulled away by other priests and before he could hurt Navarra.

He was immediately detained at the Bacolod Police Precinct 1 detention cell. He was released yesterday after Navarra refused to press charges.

A police officer in Precinct I said they would put Muñez on a Ceres bus and send him home to Barangay Mabini, Escalante town where he was from.

Muñez, 37, claimed to be a reflexologist and a miracle faith healer. He said God had ordered him to let the people know that Navarra was "Judas Iscariot" and the "Dragon."

Navarra just laughed off the incident.

He said Muñez grabbed and tore the right arm of his vestments while he and the congregation were singing "Glory Be to God."

"I was taken aback, I was not expecting it. I knew there was something wrong with him and that he was not in his right mind and was troubled," he said.

He said several people pulled Muñez away from the prelate.

Muñez said he has a wife and six children in Escalante, at least 92 kilometers northeast of this city.

He said he had placed the bishop under surveillance since Dec. 24 because he was ordered by God to reveal who Navarra really was.

When he held on to the bishop, Muñez claimed that he shook as if he was electrocuted. Then, he said, he was wrestled down by some people.

Muñez promised not to attack the bishop again because he already fulfilled his mission to reveal to the people the bishop's "true colors."

Navarra, on the other hand, dismissed the incident as part of the hazards of his job.

He said he hopes ordinary people and government officials will take action and help persons like Muñez. *Carla Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Slain mayor had links to CPLA, documents say

BAGUIO CITY—Police have stumbled on documents that link the Cordillera People's Liberation Army to slain Mayor Jose Segundo of Tubo, Abra.

Segundo's signature was among 102 "concurring" signatures appended to a supposed "CPLA unified leadership agreement," which was circulated to reporters on Tuesday. The document was distributed following a low-key Dec. 30 "unification" ceremony conducted by Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. at the official Speaker's Cottage here.

The "unification" occurred a day before the second anniversary of the slaying of rebel priest Conrado Balweg in Abra by communist rebels.

Segundo was gunned down in Barangay Tubtuba in Tubo on Dec. 27.

Chief Supt. George Aliño, Cordillera police director, said he is still uncertain how Segundo figured in the CPLA controversy.

But Aliño pointed out that the CPLA's most immediate enemy is the New People's Army and suggested in a press conference here on Wednesday that Segundo may have made himself a target for his apparent association with the militia.

"When you talk about the CPLA, you also talk about the NPA, so that is an angle we are seriously looking into," he said.

Balweg formed the CPLA after breaking away from the communist rebel movement in the 1980s.

Aliño also stressed that police will need to dig up the faction Segundo may have been involved with, because the militia itself was fractured by different splinter groups that operated under a mutual deterrence posture from 1993 until Balweg's murder in 1999.

Any faction could have a reason to attack Segundo, police investigators told the INQUIRER.

The document that bears Segundo's signature cements a power sharing deal between Balweg's supporters and the splinter forces of another Abra town mayor, Mailed Molina of Bucloc.

The name, "Joe L. Segundo," appears as the seventh signatory in the document. Beside the signature was the handwritten label: "CBA Tubo, mayor."

CBA here is apparently the acronym of the Cordillera Bodong Administration, the CPLA political organization founded by Balweg. It also refers to a similarly named defunct government bureau created to administer indigenous Filipino issues here by Executive Order 220.

Segundo's signature, however, does not appear in other documents related to the military-initiated "unification" process.

Army Col. Juanito Dalmas said investigators still have to unearth proof that Segundo was the victim of a communist hit.

Dalmas, however, made no references to Segundo's involvement with the CPLA, when he discussed a parallel military investigation looking into the mayor's murder.

Dalmas, commanding officer of the 17th Infantry Battalion in Abra, had been lead coordinator of the military-backed unification agenda for the CPLA factions.

He told the INQUIRER earlier that the military's efforts to unify the militia were in line with President Macapagal-Arroyo's Administrative Order 18, which guides the integration of 264 "qualified" CPLA militiamen into the Armed Forces of the Philippines. *Vincent Cabreza, PDI Northern Luzon Bureau*

Farmers not paid for sugarcane seek GMA help

BACOLOD CITY—At least 150 agrarian reform beneficiaries and landless farmers are appealing to President Macapagal-Arroyo to help them collect at least P15 million from the Mabuhay Sugar Corp. in unpaid sugarcane which they supplied to the financially-distressed sugar mill.

The group also urged Rep. Carlos Cojuangco and Rep. Jose Apolinario Lozada, of the province's fourth and fifth districts, to conduct an investigation of Mabuhay.

They also went to Sugar Regulatory Administrator James Ledesma to ask if there was still remaining sugar left in the mill so they could be paid.

Ledesma said he was sending SRA personnel and some farmer beneficiaries to the mill to conduct an inventory of the remaining sugar stock of the Mabuhay.

"Whatever the outcome we will take it from there," he said.

Xenia Tupas, executive director of the Negros Rural Development Institute, said Mabuhay had issued P10 million in checks to the farmers as payment for the sugarcane supplied to the sugar mill.

But the checks bounced, she added. The sugar mill also failed to pay the farmers P5.3 million for 6,700 bags of sugar.

"We are asking for a spot inventory of sugar in Mabuhay and (an) investigation of its documents," she said.

Mabuhay board chair John Dennis Chua and president Jimmy Soriano earlier issued a statement appealing to planters, employees, suppliers and creditors for understanding and patience as they were trying to find ways to raise funds to pay the farmers.

"No matter what happens, rest assured that we will make good all our commitments in due time as we do our best to continue operating the sugar mill," Soriano said in a joint statement with Chua.

Soriano said they would propose to their creditors a repayment-restructuring scheme starting from Jan. 2 to 15, "with a plea that you accept our repayment scheme in accordance with our pre-determined schedule."

"We will settle all accounts that we will incur beginning Jan. 1 in the normal course of our business. In this way, our mill can continue to operate normally with lesser financial strain," Soriano said.

Chua and Soriano also offered their "sincerest apologies for the inconveniences and the difficulties that (the suppliers and creditors) now face with us."

The Chua family took over the defunct Ma-ao Sugar Central last year and re-named it Mabuhay.

The family invested P150 million to put the mill in working condition but since last year, they have been subsidizing the cost of operating the mill, the statement said.

Carla Gomez, PDI Visayas Bureau

A 'snake' hogs the limelight in Year of the Snake

BY THE PDI NORTHERN LUZON BUREAU

YEAR-ENDER

BAGUIO CITY—2001, the Year of the Snake, aptly belonged to the controversial former Ilocos Sur Gov. Luis "Chavit" Singson, a "snake" who was born in 1941.

With the nation euphoric over the ouster of former President Joseph Estrada in January, Singson's name never disappeared from the newspapers last year.

He was considered either as hero, for paving the way for the ouster of his former friend Estrada, or a villain to the eyes of his critics who accused him of corruption while he was serving as Ilocos Sur governor.

Despite his absence from politics, Singson emerged as one of the major newsmakers in Northern Luzon for 2001.

'Snake' man

Singson's revelation in October 2000 that Estrada was the "lord of all jueteng lords" who allegedly accepted as much as P500 million in bribes, started the so-called Edsa II that culminated in January 2001. Singson also accused Estrada of accepting P130 million in kickback from Ilocos Sur's share of the tobacco excise taxes.

After President Macapagal-Arroyo's assumption into office, Singson declined to accept any government position but relented to be a consultant of the Department of Interior and Local Government in its anti-illegal gambling drive.

Singson had sought immunity from suit in connection with the P130 million tobacco tax kickback.

Charges of graft, malversation, and falsification of public documents were earlier filed against Singson in the Office of the Ombudsman in connection with the missing P130 million representing the Ilocos Sur provincial government's share of tobacco excise taxes.

In late November, the Save Ilocos Sur Alliance (Sisa) started filing a series of charges against Singson.

On Nov. 21, the Sisa filed graft charges against Singson and five Ilocos Sur officials in connection with the alleged "ghost" purchase of a backhoe loader worth P9.5 million last year.

Five days later, the same group filed charges against Singson for the purchase by the Ilocos Sur government of an allegedly overpriced parcel of land for P26 million in 1998.

On Dec. 6, technical malversation charges in connection with a P30-million fund from tobacco excise taxes were filed against Singson.

Sisa filed a plunder case on Dec. 13 against Singson and three Ilocos Sur officials before the Ombudsman.

The plunder case, the fourth in a series of cases filed by Sisa against Singson, was based on the alleged "rampant, continuous and irresponsible" release of public funds in Ilocos Sur.

Singson, however, dismissed all allegations by Sisa. He said he was confident that all cases against him would be dismissed.

Assassinations

The year was also marked by assassinations of top government officials in Northern Luzon.

Former Cagayan Rep. Rodolfo Aguinaldo and his policeman-aide were gunned down in Tuguegarao City on June 12 by suspected communist assassins.

Aguinaldo and his aide SPO1 Joey Garro came from the birthday party of Aguinaldo's wife, Lerma, when they were attacked by three gunmen in an alley leading to the congressman's rented apartment along Magallanes Street in Tuguegarao.

The Fortunato Camus Command of the New People's Army operating in Cagayan Valley had claimed responsibility for Aguinaldo's assassination.

The NPA said Aguinaldo, a former intelligence officer during the Marcos regime, "deserved to die" because of "his long list of heinous crimes against the people."

In Ilocos Sur, lawyer Agustin Chan Jr., Ilocos Sur auditor, and his driver Alex Ragacho were killed in an ambush in Bantay town on Oct. 4.

Reports in the province said Chan was killed because of his supposed knowledge of the alleged anomalous transactions entered into by the Ilocos Sur provincial government.

Chan was among those who testified during the blue ribbon committee hearings of the Senate last year in connection with the disbursement of tobacco excise taxes of Ilocos Sur.

In Ilocos Norte, regional trial court Judge Ariston Rubio here was killed in a daytime ambush on Oct. 31.

Rubio, 66, was on his way to a Batac court for a scheduled hearing on Wednesday morning when the gunmen staged the ambush along the Batac-Currimao road.

Rubio handled a civil case filed in 1999 by Irene Marcos-Araneta, the youngest daughter of former President Ferdinand Marcos, against Marcos crony Roberto Benedicto.

In Abra, suspected communist rebels gunned down Mayor Jose Segundo of Tubo town on Dec. 27.

Politics

Political clans in Northern Luzon dominated local politics in the region after the May 14 elections.

Members of the Marcos family in Ilocos Norte, the Singsons in Ilocos Sur, the Ortegas in La Union and the Dys in Isabela won over their rivals in local posts.

Veteran returning politicians also won in the local races. Among them were Pangasinan Rep. Jose de Venecia Jr., who eventually regained the speakership of the House of Representatives; former Abra Rep. Vicente Valera who regained the gubernatorial post of his province; long-time Benguet Rep. Samuel Dangwa who trounced incumbent Rep. Ronald Cosalan; and former Cagayan Rep. Manuel Mamba who defeated the late Representative Aguinaldo.

New faces also dominated Northern Luzon politics. Among them are Ifugao Gov. Teodoro Baguilat Jr., a former mayor of Kiangan town; Pangasinan Rep. Marcos Cojuangco, a son of businessman Eduardo Cojuangco Jr.; Pangasinan Rep. Amado Espino Jr., a former police colonel; and Cagayan Rep. Celia Layus, a medical doctor.

Crime

Kidnap-for-ransom incidents occurred in Northern Luzon.

Two Chinese-Filipinos were reported abducted on the same day in September.

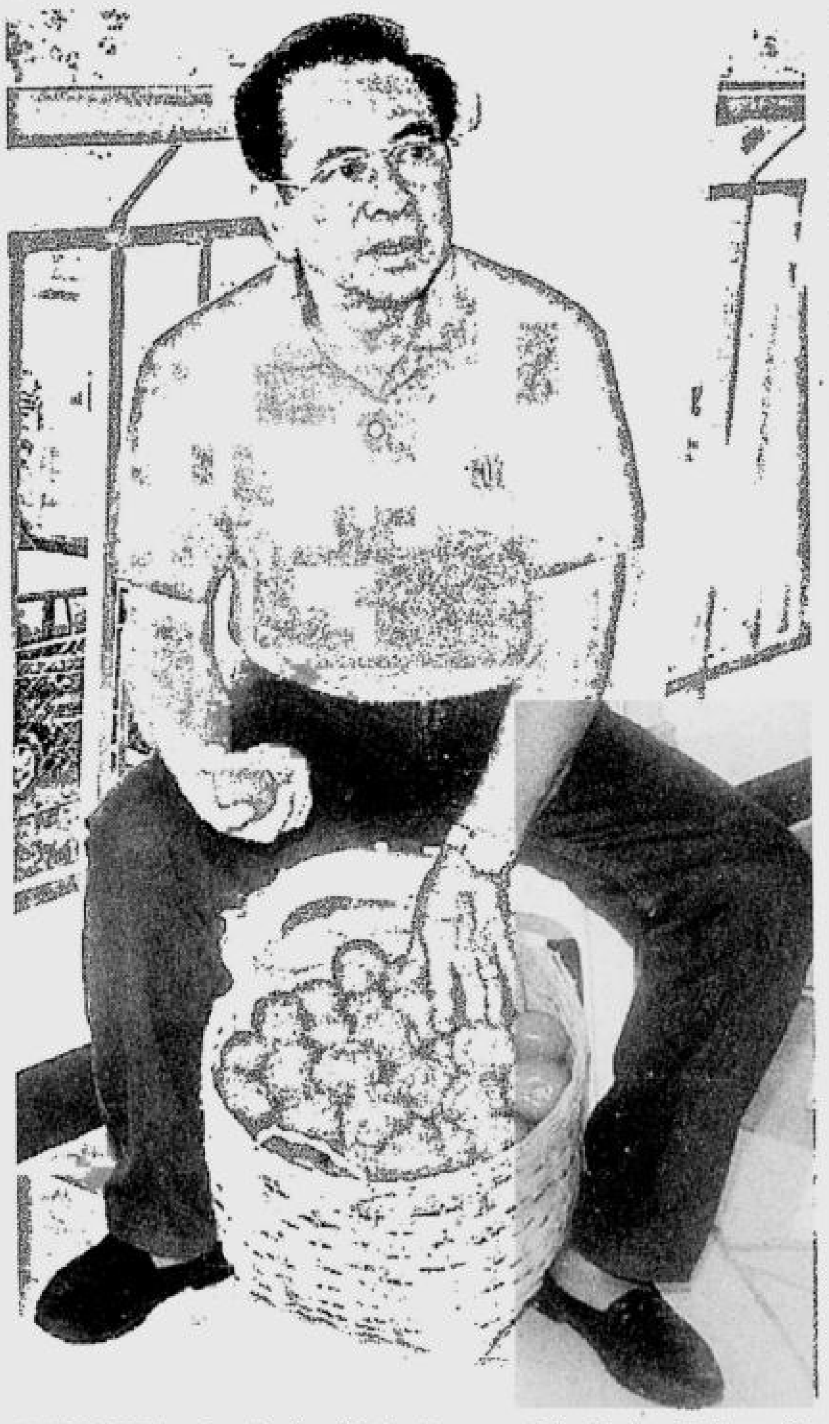
Hotel owner Charlie Ngo was abducted while he was on his way to the Star Plaza Hotel in Dagupan City on Sept. 27.

In La Union, Jacqui Rowena Tiu, a daughter of the owners of Capital Limber in San Fernando City, was kidnapped on Sept. 27, the same day that Ngo went missing. Tiu, however, was released by her abductors on Oct. 4 after her family paid them P10 million.

In Baguio City, Cadet Fourth Class Edward Domingo of the Philippine Military Academy was killed by fellow cadets who subjected him to traditional military welcome rites for hurdling his academic subjects in March.

Two University of the Philippines College Baguio graduates were abducted and killed by suspected fraternity men in March.

In Nueva Vizcaya, overseas contract worker Danilo Afalla was charged with four counts of parricide for allegedly killing his wife and three children in April.



A **'SNAKE'** hogging the limelight in the year of the Snake. Ex-Ilocos Sur Gov. Chavit Singson picking tomatoes during a visit to farms in his province when he was still its ruler. FILE

He left the country on April 19, a day after the bodies of his wife Aperacion, 39, and his children Cheenie Claire, 13, Mark Anthony, 7, and Michael Angelo, 5, were discovered in a shallow riverbank grave in Bayombong. He was arrested in Miami, Florida, and brought to the country on June 21.

Typhoon Feria

In July, Typhoon Feria flooded downtown Baguio City, which is about 5,000 feet above sea level, and submerged villages in various provinces of Northern Luzon. The typhoon destroyed millions of pesos in crops, farm animals and infrastructure in the Ilocos, Cordillera and Cagayan Valley.

Landslides triggered by Feria's strong rains claimed the lives of most of the 108 typhoon fatalities in the Cordillera.

Schilling

Jeffrey Schilling, the American hostaged by Abu Sayyaf bandits, was rescued on April 12 and was flown directly to Baguio City to meet with President Macapagal-Arroyo the following day, Good Friday.

Schilling, 25, was held captive for eight months by the Abu Sayyaf in Sulu.

Government troopers found Schilling barefoot and pockmarked with mosquito bites when they rescued him in Luuk, Sulu. The troops found him chained in a hut, freed him and took him to a military base.

Environment

The field trials of the controversial *Bacillus thuringiensis*-injected corn (Bt-corn) attracted protests from farmers and church groups in Isabela.

The opposition stemmed from the alleged harmful effects of the Bt-corn, a crop laced with a genetically modified organism, on the environment.

The United Nations, Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) put the Ifugao rice terraces on its list of "endangered" World Heritage Sites in December.

This came after Unesco criticized the Philippine government for the absence of resources in the restoration and preservation of the centuries-old engineering wonders.

The discovery of whale sharks in the waters off Lingayen Gulf in Pangasinan buoyed interest in local tourism in the province.

GMA trips, tourism

Cordillera tourism here found its best endorser in the President, who frequented Baguio and the interior towns of the Cordillera during her long working holidays in 2001.

Ms Macapagal toured Apayao, Kalinga, Ifugao, Mt. Province, Abra and Benguet to become the first president to visit the Cordillera's remotest villages. But her longest stay had been reserved for Baguio, first during the long Holy Week vacation, the All Saints' Day holiday and during the Christmas break.

Her visits had jacked up Baguio tourism by 98 percent in spite of a volatile crime situation in the middle of the third quarter, and the perennial road problems that made travel to the city difficult, according to officials of the Department of Tourism in the Cordillera.

But tourism found another "secret weapon" in second hand garments imported from Hong Kong. The so-called *wagwag* (rummage or used clothes) trade boomed into a major business, surprising even the trade department. Its estimated revenue base is P1.3 million in a month.

A judicial technicality ended five years of contentious debate about the constitutionality of Camp John Hay's conversion into an international tourism estate.

Baguio conservationists failed to meet the prescribed period, required by the Supreme Court, for questioning the legality of a 25-year government lease contract that converted the former American base land.

WEATHER FORECAST

FORECAST: Eastern Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao will experience mostly cloudy skies with scattered rainshowers becoming widespread rains over Eastern Visayas and Northeastern Mindanao. The rest of Luzon will be partly cloudy to at times cloudy with isolated rainshowers. SOURCE: PAGASA

Metro Manila	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 22°
Baguio	Partly Cloudy	Hi 23° Lo 13°
Tuguegarao	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 28° Lo 17°
Laoag	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 20°
Clark Zone	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 22°
Tagaytay	Partly Cloudy	Hi 25° Lo 19°
Legazpi	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 30° Lo 23°
Calapan	Partly Cloudy	Hi 30° Lo 20°
Bacolod	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 29° Lo 23°
Roxas	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 29° Lo 24°
Cebu	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 29° Lo 24°
Tacloban	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 28° Lo 23°
Gen. Santos	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 32° Lo 23°
Zamboanga	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 31° Lo 24°
Cagayan de Oro	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 29° Lo 22°
Davao	Cloudy with Rains	Hi 31° Lo 24°

Compiled by: Ray Leyesa, PDI Research/01/03/02

ROUNDUP

Car thieves nabbed

CABANATUAN CITY—Police arrested three suspected car thieves on Thursday night after a gun battle in Jaen, Nueva Ecija. One of the three suspects, Bernie Pascua, was shot in the leg while two of their companions, including the gang leader, escaped. PO3 Primo Salaysay, chief investigator of the Jaen police, identified the arrested suspects as Pascua, Jay Cataulin and Herami Entes. Salaysay said policemen responded to a tip that five men were trying to sell a stolen taxicab in Barangay Langla in Jaen. Upon seeing the policemen, the suspects fired at them and sped off.

Anselmo Roque, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Increase Mindanao budget

ZAMBOANGA CITY—Mayor Maria Clara Lobregat said she hoped the national government would reconsider the allocation for Mindanao in the 2002 national budget. She said Mindanao got a small share in the P780.8 billion 2002 budget approved by Congress last week, compared to Visayas and Luzon. "I'm praying that our President will reconsider the slicing off of (the) budget, because former President Joseph Estrada gave a bigger bulk to Mindanao for his 'food basket' project," Lobregat said.

Julie Alipala, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Agri a priority in Mindanao

DAVAO CITY—Secretary Paul Dominguez, presidential adviser for regional development, said the Macapagal administration will prioritize agriculture in Mindanao. Dominguez said this could be the time when the island realizes its tag as the country's food basket. He said the government would resort to credit programs, research, and expansion of irrigation projects to hasten the island's development. The President, he said, will also concentrate on the stalled peace talks with rebel groups in Mindanao.

Anthony Allada, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Suspected NPAs kill 3

DAVAO CITY—Suspected New People's Army rebels allegedly abducted and killed three persons in Cateel, Davao Oriental on Friday. A report reaching the police identified the victims as Jonie, 27; Ruel, 20; and Rudy, 29, all with surnames Baguiohanon and residents of Barangay Mainit in Cateel. Barangay chair Prosperado Abarca reported the attack to the local police. Police are still investigating the motive of the killing.

Dennis Jay Santos, PDI Mindanao Bureau

Neda exec barred from office

CEBU CITY—Romeo Escandor, regional chief of the National Economic and Development Authority in Central Visayas was barred from entering the compound of the newly built Neda Building at the Government Center in Barangay Sudlon-Lahug on Christmas Eve. He wanted to check on the utilities and the installation of their office equipment that day when stopped at the gates by two security guards of the building's contractor, H.S. Oaminal Construction, upon order of their employer, lawyer Henry Oaminal. The gates were also padlocked, he said. Escandor said H.S. Oaminal wanted Neda to pay first in full what was due to the construction firm before the building is turned over to Neda. But he said the government could not give them the full amount because the building was not yet complete and that the contractor could not furnish them the final billing statement. The Ozamis City-based H.S. Oaminal Construction won the bid to handle the third phase of the building's construction at a cost of P13 million. Phase 3 included the construction of a storage building, garage and the installation of electrical, telephone and computer utilities. The whole building costs P25 million to construct.

Debra Jane Magallon, PDI Visayas Bureau

PROVINCIAL COUNT

New Year revelry kills 2, hurts 400

BY THE PDI BUREAUS

A FIREWORKS display highlights the celebration of the New Year in Cebu City and puts a colorful smokescreen over the injuries that merrymakers suffered from firecrackers.
TONEE DESPOJO

THE CASUALTY count was down but far from ideal during New Year revelry in Luzon and the Visayas.

At least two people were killed and 400 were injured as the year 2001 bade goodbye and the year 2002 made a loud entrance.

Visayas

Mishandling of firecrackers claimed a life in Mandaue City.

Alejo Pacao, 29, was watching a two-feet fountain just lighted by his father on the terrace of their house in Casili, Mandaue some five minutes before New Year's Eve, when the device exploded.

Pacao was hit in the head and face by a steel tube that held the fountain.

He was taken to the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center in Cebu City where he died about 6 a.m., shortly after the New Year came in.

Pacao's death demonstrated the danger presented by firecrackers and pyrotechnics that remained the main cause of injuries during New Year celebrations.

At least 186 persons, half of them children, were treated for blast injuries in various hospitals in Cebu (70 victims), Iloilo City and province (75), Bacolod City (30), Leyte and Samar provinces (10), and Bohol (1).

Among the injured was Pacao's wife, Macrena, 36, who suffered blast wounds in the face and was confined at the Don Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center.

Indiscriminate firing of guns at the height of the New Year revelry also injured two persons—seven-year-old Niño Chris Romero in Lapulapu City and Simplicio Lesiguez, 58, of Basey, Samar.

The boy was at the open main door of his house in Sitio Salvage, Barangay Looc, Lapulapu City while watching TV about 1:10 a.m. on Jan. 1 when a stray bullet hit his lower left leg. He is now confined at the Mactan Community Hospital.

Lesiguez was outside his home when hit by a stray bullet. He was treated at the Eastern Visayas Regional Medical Center in Tacloban City.

In Canduman, Mandaue City, a stray bullet from a .45 cal. pistol landed on the living room of the house of Arcel Abapo about 9 p.m. Fortunately, no one was hurt.

A policeman, PO3 Raymundo Racho, was disarmed and restricted to camp at the Cebu City Police Office after his neighbors in Barangay Pardo complained that he fired his service firearm about 1 a.m. on Jan. 1.

Records from various hospitals in key areas in the Visayas showed that most of the victims suffered injuries in the hands due to firecracker explosions.

In Iloilo City, hospital records showed that blast victims started arriving as early as 6 p.m. of Dec. 31 and the number grew as midnight neared and shortly after New Year's Eve.

Western Visayas

Western Visayas, which covers the provinces of Iloilo, Negros Occidental, Antique, Capiz, Aklan and Guimaras, ranked third nationwide with 134 cases of blast injuries up from 118 in 1999.

But health officials said the 75 cases of blast injuries recorded so far was not an indication that the number of victims went down because the figure was taken only from hospitals in Iloilo City and those in nearby towns.

Boholanos peacefully greeted the New Year with only a single incident of blast injury in the entire province.

Reports reaching Camp Dagohoy based in Tagbilaran City identified the lone victim as Socrates Nanoy, 29, a fisherman residing in Barangay Bagongbanwa, an island-village about 30 minutes by pump boat from mainland Tubigon.

The same reports showed that a whistle bomb exploded in Nanoy's right hand on Jan. 1 when he picked it up, thinking that its fuse had been extinguished.

There was no report of injuries caused by firecrackers or stray bullets in government-owned or private hospitals in Tagbilaran City.

Pangasinan

In Pangasinan, three persons were hit by stray bullets while 47 others were treated for burns from firecrackers and pyrotechnics.

Hit by stray bullets were Rocky Erpelo, 14, of San Jacinto town; Emiliano de Guzman, 26, of Bayambang town; and Teofilo Soriano, 53, of San Carlos City.

Erpelo was watching the revelry on the street when a bullet hit him in the right arm. De Guzman was resting in a *nipa* hut when a bullet hit him in the right thigh.

Soriano was broiling meat outside his house when a stray bullet hit him in the back.

Records at the Region I Medical Center (RIMC) in Dagupan City showed that 32 blast victims treated there. The youngest recorded victim was a five-year-old girl while the oldest was a 53-year-old man.

Compared to last year, the casualties in this year's revelry went down. There were 106 firecracker blast victims last year.

But doctors were expecting the number of victims to increase this year as patients seek treatment in various hospitals.

At the Pangasinan Provincial Hospital in San Carlos City, 18 people were treated for blast injuries.

Baguio City

In Baguio City, eight victims of firecracker burns were treated by local hospitals, double last year's records of four burn cases.

Most of the victims were children who suffered minor burns from picking up unexploded firecrackers, which littered the city's streets until 6 a.m. Tuesday, said nurse Cherry Octavo of the Baguio General Hospital and Medical Center (BGHMC).

The BGHMC emergency ward treated seven victims, including a 30-year-old woman who was injured after a box of firecrackers she was carrying exploded as she went home on New Year's Eve.

Octavo said the woman's parcel was ignited by a stray, lighted firecracker that shot out from a reveler. She is being treated for eye injuries.

The Saint Louis University Sacred Heart Hospital recorded only one burn victim, who is also being treated for eye injury.

At 11:30 p.m. Monday, the top two floors of a three-story wooden building on T. Alonzo Street was destroyed by fire allegedly caused by a lighted firecracker.

No one was hurt in the fire but arson investigators questioned the building's three caretakers after receiving reports that they were partying and explosing firecrackers inside the building on New Year's Eve.

Firemen also responded to small fires in Barangay City Camp, Benitez Court along Magsaysay Avenue and at the bicycle-rental section of the Burnham Park. A fire was also reported in the Brookside area.

Isabela

In Isabela, at least 13 people were taken to various hospitals in the province for burns and cut fingers due to firecracker blasts.

Supt. Nelson Nario, Isabela police director, said the revelry was very "peaceful" as there were no reports of indiscriminate firing of policemen and soldiers in the province.

Police said a *rebentador* exploded in the chest of a man who was watching his neighbors celebrate the New Year. The revelers threw a five-star firecracker at Dominic Olalia of Santiago City resulting in his injuries. His two companions were also hurt.

Police arrested Jose Mari Paraiso of San Mateo, Isabela after he fired his .38 cal. gun. Paraiso said he fired his gun out of drunkenness.

Central Luzon

In Bulacan, Rogelio Laudit, 44, died from severe burns and wounds in the chest after an illegal firecracker, *pla-pla*, exploded while tucked in his armpit.

Police said Meliton de la Cruz, 14, was hit by a stray bullet in the thigh during the revelry in Malolos town. Reports said the bullet came from a .38 cal. revolver but investigators could not determine who fired the gun that injured De la Cruz.

Two children were hit by stray bullets in Pampanga while 99 people, mostly children, were wounded in firecracker-related accidents in Central Luzon on New Year's Eve.

In Pampanga, indiscriminate firing by a still unidentified gun owner seriously injured Den Rose Relente, 4, of Sasmuan town.

The bullet, believed to have come from a .22 cal. gun, pierced Relente's right chest and traveled to her right hip where it remains lodged. For lack of money, no operation was done on the girl, according to her mother Rosario. The girl is still confined at the Jose B. Lingad Memorial Regional Hospital's surgery ward in the City of San Fernando.

Sasmuan residents also reported that a 7-year-old boy in Barangay Batang was hit by a stray bullet in the left eye. The boy, said to be in critical condition, was rushed to a hospital in Manila.

Camp Olivas reports showed that Bulacan had the most residents injured by firecrackers at 45. Nueva Ecija had 28; Angeles, seven; Olongapo City, six; Zambales and Pampanga, four each; Bataan, three; Aurora, two; and Tarlac, one.

The number of casualties could be higher as Camp Olivas reports did not include those who received medical treatment in several government and private hospitals.

In the City of San Fernando, policemen arrested 13 people found either selling dangerous fireworks or selling without license. Several of those arrested were wives or relatives of policemen in Pampanga.

Doctors at the JBLRMH said most of the injuries were caused by *lusis* (sparklers), *kwitis* (skyrocket) and *trianggulo* (triangular firecrackers).

In Tarlac, a two-hour fire of still unknown origin razed the public market in Moncada town on New Year's Eve. Police reported the damage at P75 million.

Quezon, Laguna

A house was damaged and at least 39 firecracker blast victims were reported in Quezon and Laguna after the New Year celebration.

Twenty of the casualties were admitted in the Quezon Memorial Hospital, while the other 19 patients were treated at the San Pablo City Hospital and other hospitals in Laguna.

A teenage boy lost three right hand fingers when he tried to pick up an unexploded firecracker on Tuesday morning.

Noel Casenilo, 17, a resident of Dalahican in Lucena City, said the huge firecracker exploded in his hand after he found it on the street.

Most of the victims suffered minor injuries, a staffer of the Quezon Memorial Hospital emergency room said.

No death or injury was reported in Batangas province.

A house along the Philippine National Railways Compound in Lucena City owned by Rodrigo Besas also suffered damages after a merrymaker tossed a firecracker inside it in the middle of the New Year celebration.

Eduardo and Helen Besas were rushed to the hospital for minor burns.

A tired and drunken New Year celebrator was stabbed to death at past midnight, as he was about to rest inside a small market in Market View Subdivision, Lucena City.

Police identified the victim as Saturnino Suayan of Barangay Munting Bayan, Tayabas, Quezon.

Investigator said Alvino Miranda, a resident of the same barangay, stabbed the victim several times in different parts of the body.

Rodolfo Luces, 48, a farmer from Barangay Alije, Tagkawayan, Quezon was shot in front of his teenage son by his neighbor and long-time enemy just as the clock struck 12.

The victim was in critical condition at the Quezon Memorial Hospital.

The victim's son, Ronnie Luces, who also suffered a bullet wound in the left waist, identified the suspect as one Buenaventura Diaz.

The suspect escaped after the shooting.

In Bicol, Chief Supt. Enrique Galang, police regional director, said no policeman in the region fired his gun to celebrate the New Year.

He said policemen were earlier warned of summary dismissal should they be caught firing their guns to celebrate the New Year.

Galang said before the New Year, they inspected the policemen's guns in front of them.

"I will also order another inspection to determine if there are firearms that have been illegally discharged and used in the celebration," he said. *Yolanda Fuertes, Vincent Cabreza, Frank Cimatu, and Villamor Visaya Jr., PDI Northern Luzon Bureau, and Tonette Orejas, PDI Central Luzon Desk; Delfin Mallari Jr., Romy Ponte and Mei Magsino, PDI Southern Luzon Bureau; Jhunnex Napallacan, Carla Gomez, Ma. Diosa Labiste, Chito Fuentes and Cynthia Borgueta, PDI Visayas Bureau*

Davao hotels question rosy figures on arrival of tourists

DAVAO CITY—The city's tourism sector said it was wondering where the Department of Tourism got the basis to announce that there was an increase in hotel occupancy here in the year 2001.

Arturo Boncato Jr., president of the Davao Tourism Association (Data), said the industry never felt the supposed 26 percent increase in hotel occupancy that the DOT recorded this year.

"That's something the whole industry has never felt. That (data) still has to be substantiated," Boncato said.

However, he said Data was not trying to mock the DOT's figure saying there was really no existing system to accurately monitor and report the number of tourists arriving in the city.

Earlier, the DOT said hotel occupancy in the city reached 383,216 by November compared to only 303,389 during the first 11 months last year.

The agency said the number of Japanese visitors also increased to 15,677 in November compared to 11,416 during the same period last year.

There were also 2,677 more American visitors this year compared to last year.

Boncato said the figure was not accurate, but it could have been the fault of the system used by the DOT which must be erroneous.

"Actually, I challenged this system before. In Metro Manila, they come up with more accurate figures because they check with the immigration (bureau) and also the embarkation cards (of airline passengers). In domestic tourism, no system is in place," he said.

To come up with a more accurate figure, Boncato suggested that airline companies help in handing out visitor forms to their passengers so the DOT and the private sector can come up with more accurate figures on the number of foreign and local tourists visiting the city.

Boncato also said that adopting the system being used in Boracay could become one option. He said Boracay tourism officials have an accurate way of coming up with the right numbers, which they then submit to their local DOT office for record purposes.

"Those who arrive at the airport are made to sign up so they get a good idea of who the people are . . . but the system is not too scientific . . ." he said.

Hartmut Ballin, general manager of Marco Polo Hotel-Davao, said hotels are in the best position to know whether the business is good or bad.

"Don't fix the numbers. The hotels are empty. And if they are saying that they are doing (better) business this year than last year, that's not correct," he said.

Ballin said that to get the real figure on hotel occupancy, the DOT only has to ask hotel operators. *Joel Escovilla, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Press czar flexes muscle, raps Solgen

(From page A1)

(SMC) and Japanese brewer Kirin Co. Ltd.

Sanchez pointed out that Marcelo's statements conflicted with those of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

He said the conflict "could have been avoided" had the solicitor general first coordinated with him.

"Take for example the Solgen's statements in the INQUIRER today. This is not quite in line with the President's policy," Sanchez said in a studio interview with ABS-CBN News Channel yesterday afternoon.

"What we'll do is advise the Solgen to be more careful, because he's not involved in policymaking," Sanchez said, adding:

"But I think he meant no harm."

Marcelo had expressed worry that the deal—wherein Kirin would buy 15 percent of SMC—would "dilute" the value of the coconut farmers' shares in the food and beverage conglomerate from 27 percent to 24 percent, and give its chair, Eduardo "Danding" Cojuangco Jr., "effective control."

The government claims that Cojuangco bought his SMC shares using coconut levy funds.

The President had earlier said the $540-million Kirin investment was a "shot in the arm" for the economy.

Nonetheless she had ordered Trade Secretary Mar Roxas II to review the deal in order to protect the government's interest in SMC.

One voice

Sanchez, a former representative of Rizal, said the President had directed him to "coordinate" all government press releases and advertisements "to make sure that the government speaks in one voice."

The order is contained in Memorandum Order No. 49 dated Dec. 13. It was released to the media only last week.

Sanchez admitted that he himself was still unclear on how to go about his new role.

He said he was still drafting the "mechanics" of how to implement the memo but that he planned to recruit a staff of about seven "competent" people.

MARCELO

SANCHEZ

The President's spokesperson, Rigoberto Tiglao, has had a hard time justifying the memo.

Reporters had noted that Malacañang had virtually created a "clearinghouse" over which Sanchez would preside.

Sanchez had claimed, on the other hand, that the setup would fast-track the dissemination of information.

But yesterday, the Office of the Press Secretary (OPS) did not produce a transcript of the President's special broadcast Tuesday night linking the New Year's Eve murder of Baron Cervantes, the self-styled spokesperson of the Young Officers' Union, to a destabilization plot.

The OPS merely issued a news release late yesterday afternoon.

But for all that, Malacañang is planning to expand the scope of the "clearinghouse" to cover local government units.

Bobby Capco, press undersecretary for media operations, said the President also wanted a coordinator for each region who would be on top of all government information offices in his/her area.

Capco said the President brought up the idea to him when they had a meeting in Baguio City last week. He said he was now drafting a memo to carry out the plan.

Charges

The militant group Pamalakaya yesterday urged the administration to file appropriate charges against Cojuangco for his "unauthorized and amoral act" of selling 15 percent of SMC to Kirin.

"We are now in the year of the horse, and what we want is a fast gallop for truth and justice, not just easy horseback riding. We don't want to be taken on another roller coaster ride regarding the coconut levy fund issue," the group said in a statement.

Pamalakaya national chair Rodolfo Sambajon said the deal was designed to abort efforts by coconut farmers to reclaim coconut levy fund shares invested in SMC as the Coconut Industry Investment Fund during the Marcos regime.

Gerry Albert-Corpuz, Pamalakaya information chief, said the Presidential Commission on Good Government should fast-track the recovery not only of the 27-percent SMC share representing coconut levy fund shares but also the 20-percent stake represented by Cojuangco in SMC.

"This master-slave relationship must be put to an end with our coconut farmers emerging as winners for the sake of truth and justice," Corpuz said. "We cannot allow the coconut Mafia of Danding Cojuangco to continue its oppression and exploitation of small coconut farmers." *With a report from Gerald G. Lacuarta*

Dramatic impact seen in $1-B recovery fund

(From page A1)

Macapagal-Arroyo dated Dec. 13, 2001 and circulated by De Venecia at the briefing:

- Invest in non-performing loans and real estate assets such as those of the Philippine National Bank, Land Bank of the Philippines and other Philippine financial institutions, both government and privately owned.
- Invest in non-performing residential mortgage portfolios such as those of the LBP, PNB, the Home Development Mutual Fund and the National Home Mortgage Finance Corp.
- Finance the development of new housing projects.
- Invest in new economic development projects.
- Participate in and lead the development of the domestic capital market through the issuance of securities backed by performing residential mortgages, government royalties from the Malampaya natural gas project and other similar assets.

"Together with our private sector joint venture partners, Lehman Brothers would like to express its interest in investing in the Republic of the Philippines through a Philippine Recovery Fund investment vehicle, of as much as $1 billion for economically viable opportunities," Bhattal wrote.

Major investments

De Venecia said the investment of Lehman Brothers would trigger a "major and significant flow of investments" from other foreign investors.

Camacho said the $1-billion equity fund was a "very significant indication of investor confidence" in the Philippines and is "really a nice stimulus for the economy."

Buenaventura said the fund would be used in part to construct new housing units for middle-class and the marginalized, and noted that this would boost the economy in general because several major industries like cement and wood are involved in housing construction.

De Venecia said he discussed the fund with the President over lunch in Pangasinan on New Year's Day.

He also said Bhattal would arrive in Manila for a meeting with the President on Jan. 11 and 12. A memorandum of understanding would be signed then, he added.

The Speaker said he had broached the idea of a recovery fund before a gathering of international investors in Hawaii last August.

He said he, Camacho and Buenaventura subsequently worked on the scheme with Lehman Brothers.

"RECOVERY Fund," stresses Speaker Jose De Venecia during a press conference on Wednesday to announce the $1-billion investment of the Lehman Brothers. He's flanked by Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho and BSP Governor Rafael Buenaventura.

JESS YUSON

He said buying real estate mortgages would not be in violation of the constitutional ban on foreign ownership of land.

"It will be a temporary, not a permanent, holding. In other words, they will acquire the real estate, they will strengthen it, refurbish it, provide capital for it and immediately pass it on to others," De Venecia said.

Camacho clarified that foreign institutions could possess real estate mortgages. He said the proposed Special Purpose Vehicle Act sought to provide a temporary holding period during which these assets could be restructured and eventually disposed off by the asset management companies to be set up by Lehman Brothers and other interested investment banks.

Buenaventura said a lot of these real estate non-performing loans involved empty properties that were supposed to have been developed into housing subdivisions but were hit by the 1997 Asian financial crisis.

Global bank

In his letter, Tokyo-based Bhattal introduced Lehman Brothers as one of the largest US-based global investment banks, with particular strength in investing in and managing real estate and non-performing loan portfolios.

He said his company had an "unmatched track record of successful transactions in residential mortgage and non-performing loan portfolios in Asia."

"We wish to bring similar levels of capital and expertise into the Philippines as we have in Japan, Korea, Thailand and Indonesia," Bhattal said.

Bhattal expressed his company's support for Ms Macapagal's economic recovery program.

"We share the view of Speaker Jose de Venecia, with whom we have had much constructive conversations, that a Philippine Recovery Fund is critical for the recovery of the banking, real estate and infrastructure sectors," Bhattal said.

He said the fund could "rapidly reduce the high levels of non-performing loans and distressed assets in the financial sector."

"We believe that once implemented and invested, the fund will have a significant impact in stimulating commercial activity and housing developments throughout the economy," he said.

Bhattal said he had many discussions with De Venecia, Camacho and Buenaventura who encouraged Lehman Brothers to launch the project "soonest, under the most open and transparent terms."

"In spite of the difficulties in the global economic environment, we are prepared to move forward now and to invite other prestigious international investment companies to join us and invest in the (PRF)," Bhattal said.

Two actions

Bhattal said that after evaluating the government's residential mortgage portfolio, Lehman Brothers was recommending two actions: securitize the performing portion of the portfolio and conduct an outright sale of the non-performing portion.

He said the government would be able to achieve higher proceeds from this two-pronged approach rather than a pure outright sale of the assets.

At the briefing, De Venecia denied a Securitization Act was a condition for setting up the PRF, but admitted that Lehman Brothers would be "more encouraged" if such a law were passed by Congress.

He said the proposed Securitization Act and the creation of a Special Purpose Vehicle to acquire all non-performing assets of the government—estimated at P270 billion—may be passed during the first quarter of the year.

23 more plunder cases in ₱5.3-B tax credit scam

(From page A1)

fidavits implicating certain private individuals and DOF officials, who allegedly conspired to defraud the government of billions of pesos in taxes.

Gison said the Macapagal administration was against any out-of-court settlement, reiterating that the President had given specific instructions to go after erring parties.

"The President does not want any out-of-court settlement because it means that crime pays. The official policy is to go prosecute those people who were allegedly involved in the scam," Gison said.

Of the 23 plunder cases, 11 cases involve the Chingkoe group of companies owned by the couple Faustino and Gloria Chingkoe. The couple were among the six Chingkoe executives charged with plunder on Dec. 13, together with Shell treasury and taxation general manager Pacifico Cruz, Petron general manager Celso Legarda, former Finance Undersecretary Antonio Belicena and former finance officials Uldarico Andutan Jr. and Rowena Malonzo in connection with the alleged illegal issuance and transfer of 40 TCCs worth P131.2 million.

The other plunder cases include oil firms and a number of bus companies, the sources said.

The Chingkoe group accounted for some 48 percent of all documented tax credit cases.

Palace sources said they were aware of quiet initiatives by certain parties to derail the prosecution of erring parties. "We would avoid the pitfalls committed by the Estrada administration," one source said.

During the Estrada administration, Special Task Force 156 built up cases against those allegedly involved in the scam but these cases were never filed after Jaime Dichaves, a known presidential crony, allegedly intervened.

The task force is composed of ranking officials of the DOF, the Department of Justice, the National Bureau of Investigation, and the Office of the Executive Secretary.

Gison, who was with the accounting firm SGV before he joined the government, said the President had vowed that she would not allow even the country's biggest firms to cheat on taxes.

He said the President wanted to stop tax leakage that had helped widen the budget deficit, projected to reach P145 billion for all of 2001.

One-stop shop

The plunder complaints are based on Executive Order No. 38, which reorganized Task Force 156 and ordered it to investigate, gather evidence and prosecute individuals, corporations and other entities suspected of being involved in the illegal issuance and use of tax credit certificates at the one-stop shop inter-agency tax credit and duty drawback center (OSS).

The tax credit certificate system was an incentive scheme for domestic companies importing raw materials from abroad.

The companies were granted tax credits which were offset against taxes, duties and fees they were supposed to pay the government.

The TCCs, usually issued by the finance secretary, were also transferable, but only under certain conditions.

In the first plunder complaint, the task force alleged that the OSS, an agency attached to the finance department which issued the certificates, had unlawfully granted TCCs to the Chingkoe group's Diamond Knitting Corp. for three years after the company closed down in 1993.

The company then allegedly illegally transferred the TCCs to Pilipinas Shell and Petron Corp., which then used them to pay their P131.2 million excise tax obligations with the Bureau of Internal Revenue.

In the complaint-affidavit filed on Dec. 13, Task Force 156 claimed that the Chingkoe group, particularly Diamond Knitting, obtained 40 TCCs worth P131.2 million from the OSS.

But the TCCs were applied for even after the Chingkoe-owned company had closed down.

"It was impossible for these oil companies to have made deliveries to Diamond Knitting for the simple reason that (Diamond Knitting) did not have any operations and therefore had no use for petroleum products," the complaint stated.

The task force said the "trade relationship" between the Chingkoe firm and the two oil companies was "nonexistent."

Marines out; US-trained unit to rescue hostages

(From page A1)

28, 2001 held in Basilan.

"They (the Marines) have been given a chance to implement the rescue operations since the hostages are in their area of operation but nothing happened," according to an officer of the Southern Command.

Right track

But a Marine officer countered that they "are on the right track and that given the opportunity, we will be able to not just rescue the hostages but to also neutralize the Abu Sayyaf especially the unit led by Isnilon Hapilon."

For the last one month, the group led by Hapilon who is in physical control of the hostages has been in the general area of Maluso and Sumisip, an area which is under the Marine Brigade in Basilan.

The Marine officer said," we have actually pinpointed the area where they are keeping the hostages."

Through the help of a civilian asset in Maluso, the Marines monitored several independent negotiations going on related to the release of the hostages.

But the Marines' failure to proceed with the "big push" is hampered by their having to clear their every move with the Southcom.

But a source from the Southern Command explains that this is exactly the reason the Marines will have to be pulled out of Basilan.

But a US congressman from Kansas, the home state of the Burnhams, is "satisfied" with the military's rescue efforts, according to Press Undersecretary Bobby Capco.

President Macapagal-Arroyo met with US Rep. Todd Thiart of Kansas on Tuesday night at the Palace.

"It was our impression that the congressman was satisfied with the explanations of the government especially when he was told that 43 officers and enlisted personnel have been killed in the campaign against the Abu Sayyaf," Capco said.

Politics

A separate report also critical of the Marines claimed that some officers in Basilan had become "too friendly" with the Abu Sayyaf. The same report stated that "supplies were channeled to the Abu Sayyaf" allegedly facilitated by the Marines.

But another Marine colonel based in Tumahubong says, "*Napulitika lang kami. Hindi nabigyan ng chance ang diskarte namin.* (Politics did us in. Our strategy was not given a chance.)"

Sources from the Southern Command say, the reason for the pullout is "tactical and operational in nature."

But Marine sources say they believe otherwise. This is not an ordinary operational and tactical move, they say.

Protesting civilians

The first two Marine companies to go are led by Lieutenant Colonels Jun de Leon and Armand Banez.

Some 500-civilians in Tumahubong protested the Southcom decision to replace the Marines with Scout Rangers.

The rally calling for the retention of the Marines was held on New Year's Eve.

The protesters composed of NGOs and local officials were led by the parish priest of Maluso. They said they are cooperating with the Marines because the "Marines understand the dynamics on how it is to live in an area where there are armed bandits like the Abu Sayyaf."

As the protest was taking place, trucks of Marine personnel were making their way toward the capital city of Isabela en route to Zamboanga aboard a navy ship.

Some even carried placards saying, "*Huwag ninyo kaming iwan.*" (Don't leave us.)

But the decision is final, the Marines' time in Basilan is over.

More equipment from US

The military wants more US equipment for its operation against the Abu Sayyaf.

According to Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Jose Mabanta, the military operation against the bandit group continues but they need to upgrade their "target acquisition assets" and night-fighting capability to counter the difficult terrain in Mindanao.

"What we have mostly are first-generation equipment," Mabanta told defense reporters.

Elite Army units, Mabanta said, have night-vision and thermal-imaging equipment but these are older models.

These units have been deployed against the Abu Sayyaf.

His remarks came a day after Southern Command chief Lt. Gen. Roy Cimatu revealed that he had talked to US Rep. Todd Tiahrt about the need for unmanned surveillance equipment.

The US government has committed more than $100 million in military assistance for this year.

Five helicopters, equipped with night-fighting capability, are due to arrive this month.

Earlier, a C-130 military cargo plane, a gunboat, three other Huey helicopters, trucks and high-powered rifles were delivered to the military as part of the military assistance.

A training camp, to be run jointly by Filipino and American officials, is being set up in Zamboanga City.

The training, officials said earlier, would focus on anti-terrorism as part of the US commitment to fight international terrorism worldwide. *With a report from Dona Pazzibugan*

Guess, who won ₱200M?

(From page A1)

national direct dialing (NDD) traffic last year.

A call cost P10 per minute for game shows and P5 per minute for other services.

San Agustin said the company introduced these new services in 2001 "to augment traditional NDD services" as PLDT's local and international long distance services had both been "heavily affected by the popularity of cell phones and texting."

San Agustin said the company had to come up with other services that would encourage landline usage, especially direct distance dialing.

One way was to tie up with game shows "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire," "Weakest Link," "Game Ka Na Ba" and erstwhile "Korek Ka Dyan."

Those who wanted to join these game shows had to use their PLDT landlines to be in the running for a slot in any of the shows. Calls cost P10 per minute.

Joe D' Mango

Aside from the television show tie-ups, PLDT also introduced the "Lovenotes Hotline" featuring radio and television personality Joe D' Mango and the "Fortune Hotline" featuring fortune-teller Jojo Acuin.

People in need of love counseling or those who want to see into their future need only dial certain numbers to avail themselves of these services that cost P5 a minute.

As for international direct dialing (IDD), a strategy that the telecommunications firm came up with to encourage its usage was the introduction of the PLDT Budget Card. It is a destination-specific discounted calling service that priced IDD calls at only $0.24 a minute compared with the normal rate of $0.40 a minute.

Initially, the card could be used for calls to the United States, Canada and Hawaii, but San Agustin said plans of introducing more card variants were already on the drawing board.

In February, PLDT lowered its IDD rate to $0.40 a minute regardless of time and distance. This helped increase the declining outbound IDD minutes that the carrier had faced when the IDD rate was more than $1 a minute.

The NDD rate was made uniform in November at P4.50 a minute regardless of time, distance and landline service provider.

Before that, in May, PLDT's NDD call cost P3 a minute for PLDT-to-PLDT calls, and P3.50, P4 or P5 a minute for those made to other landlines. This move helped arrest the decline in NDD minutes.

Simplified rates

PLDT's "rates simplification program" has made long distance calling a "less stressful experience for every caller," thus encouraging them to use the service more.

For 2001, PLDT saw higher activation rates of the NDD and IDD features by their subscribers. To date, 84 percent of its total subscriber base are NDD-capable, while 58 percent are IDD-activated.

San Agustin said the company would continue to implement customer retention programs and direct marketing efforts to help protect its revenue base.

He added that PLDT would also come up with more premium phone services, much like their existing love counseling and fortune-telling hotlines, within 2002.

LTO anomalies linked to killing

(From page A1)

The report details the destabilization plot against the administration and contains the names of four RAM members and two YOU members involved in the plot, according to Saycon.

Saycon declined to identify the alleged coup plotters.

But sources said the six alleged coup plotters were Abenina, Cardeño, retired Navy Capt. Proceso Maligalig, Supt. Diosdado Valeroso, retired Col. Romeo Lim and Lt. Senior Grade Donn Anthony Miraflor, a member of the Navy special reaction unit.

Miraflor, a former member of the disbanded Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force, had been placed on technical arrest on Dec. 28 for his alleged involvement in the destabilization plot. He was arrested after military intelligence agents seized 100 blocks of C4 and TNT explosives from his former subordinates.

Lim and Maligalig, RAM spokesperson, had a heated exchange with Cervantes on radio last week following the latter's disclosure on radio about a clandestine meeting of YOU-RAM members in Puerto Azul, a beach resort in Cavite, to hatch "Oplan: Noche Buena," the alleged coup plot against the administration.

The pair had tried to discredit Cervantes, charging that he was a self-proclaimed spokesperson of the YOU, and hence, had no right to speak on behalf of the group.

A source close to Cervantes on Tuesday night said the slain Army officer often spoke against Maligalig and other RAM and YOU officers.

"He told me that his enemies might soon decide to finish him off," the source said.

Lim, a member of both RAM and YOU, had denied any hand in the killing but said he was open to investigation.

"The police can invite me for questioning any time. I'm willing to help (in the investigation). Yesterday, I was home the whole day waiting for an investigator but no one came," he said in an interview over dzBB.

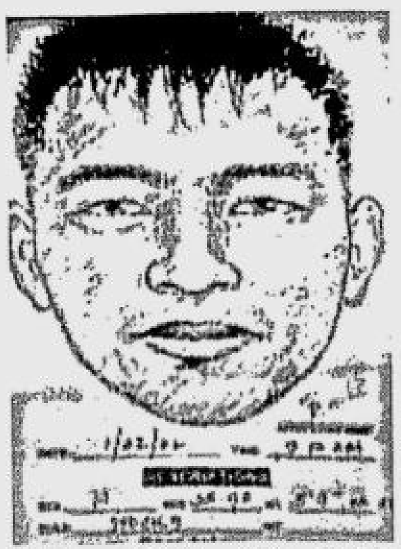
Lim hinted that RAM would not gain anything from killing Cervantes. "Like what an official had said, it was a useless endeavor."

But he admitted that RAM members were piqued by Cervantes' disclosure that they were plotting a military coup.

Lim also maintained that RAM had no reason to stage a coup against the Macapagal administration, saying that some of its members are holding key positions in the PNP, the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the executive branch.

He cited Chief Supt. Reynaldo Berroya, Central Luzon director; Chief Supt. Eduardo Matillano, Southern Mindanao director; Col. Billy Bibit, customs district collector in Subic; and Calajate, who is with the Philippine Gaming Corp.

CERVANTES: He wanted reforms


TALL, stocky with brown complexion, is how witnesses describe the man who shot Cervantes dead.

Honasan's call

Sen. Gregorio Honasan, one of the founding members of RAM, called on his comrades to cooperate in the ongoing investigation.

Honasan said the RAM leadership should "extend whatever help and cooperation is needed by the police authorities in order to make clear that none of its members had a hand in Cervantes' death."

He denounced "the heartless killing of Cervantes."

A day after the killing, police officials and investigators voiced suspicions that the rift within YOU and Cervantes' disclosure of the destabilization plot had to do with Cervantes' murder, although they did not discount a personal grudge as the motive.

Chief Supt. Jose Gutierrez, SPD chief, said the police would not limit the investigation to Cervantes' reported rift with RAM and YOU members.

"We don't want to put any political color to this investigation," Gutierrez told the INQUIRER. "This is a purely criminal investigation."

Police will instead concentrate on the "antecedents and resulting irritants" of the supposed internal squabble within the YOU, according to the SPD chief.

Mendoza stressed that police investigators had to first establish the motive behind the killing before they could ascertain the identity of the gunman or the mastermind.

"There were some information and pieces of evidence that we have recovered pointing to some motives," he told reporters.

Mendoza said the police had "good leads" on the suspects, noting that employees of the 7-Eleven convenience store, who witnessed the killing, and the staff of the Perpetual Hospital where Cervantes was taken were now in police custody.

"What's good about these is that we have witnesses," he said.

Sketch of gunman

Based on the witnesses' description, a sketch of the gunman was released by police yesterday. Cervantes was shot near the corner of Times Street and Alabang-Zapote Road at around 6 p.m. on Dec. 31.

In the sketch, the gunman was between 35 and 40 years old, at least 5-foot-7-inch tall and stocky with brown complexion.

He was wearing a brown polo and denim pants when he walked up behind Cervantes and shot him in the head, police said.

Gutierrez said investigators were trying to reconstruct Cervantes' activities on Monday afternoon: from 3:15 p.m. when he left Saycon's house to 6 p.m. when he was gunned down.

"This is the gray area that we want to address," he said. "We want to know the persons he was with, he talked to, he called up within that time frame."

Police were also trying to determine the person Cervantes was supposedly waiting for at Times Street where he was killed.

Cell phone

Another key evidence is the cellular phone of Cervantes, which was recovered at the crime scene, according to Gutierrez.

Gutierrez said he had ordered his men to identify the telephone numbers dialed and received, including text messages sent and received by Cervantes hours before the killing.

He refused to divulge the numbers, but said that many of them were not registered at Cervantes' mobile phone.

"We are on the right track. We can solve this soon."

A parallel probe is to be conducted by the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG).

Director Lucas Managuelod, head of the Directorate for Investigation and Detective Management, ordered Director Nestorio Gualberto, CIDG chief, to conduct the probe.

"This would speed up the investigation," Managuelod said. "So far, what have been coming out are speculations. We have to conduct investigation based on evidence and hard facts."

Ms Macapagal has given specific instructions to the PNP "to solve the case immediately."

Managuelod said he still had confidence in some seasoned CIDG investigators even after the CIDG had earlier bungled the probe of the murder of actress Nida Blanca.

Civilian pals, not military comrades, came to honor him

(From page A1)

A group led by Pastor Boy Saycon, Copa secretary general, came to the wake at Holy Trinity Memorial Chapel in Sucat, Parañaque, as early as 5 p.m. Tuesday.

Six hours earlier, only Cervantes' 60-year-old father Roque and a friend were at the wake. The chairs were empty.

Saycon was joined by Jose Luis Araneta of the Silent Protest Movement, Leonard de Vera of the Equal Justice for All Movement, Dante Jimenez of the Volunteers Against Crime and Corruption (VACC), Lauro Vizconde also of VACC, Mary "Rosebud" Ong, and Danny Devnani.

Last night, among those who came to the wake were Rep. Satur Ocampo of the partylist group Bayan Muna, Caloocan City Councilor Nathanael Santiago of Bayan Muna and former Tarlac Gov. Tingting Cojuangco.

Devnani yesterday described Cervantes' killing as a "work of evil."

"The message is clear. Those who stand for the truth are silenced. Rosebud and I could be next," said Devnani, former "owner" of Club 419.

He told a Senate committee hearing in August 2001, that "evil people" like deposed President Joseph Estrada and Sen. Panfilo Lacson had often met at the club to plot various illegal activities.

Ong had testified at the Senate last year that Lacson was involved in drug trafficking and kidnapping.

Film director Carlo J. Caparas and wife also came on the first day of the wake.

Saycon and his group stayed on until the wee hours, offering their sympathy and prayers to those left by Cervantes.

Flowers, mostly coming from President Macapagal-Arroyo, and Cervantes' friends in the private sector, came only yesterday.

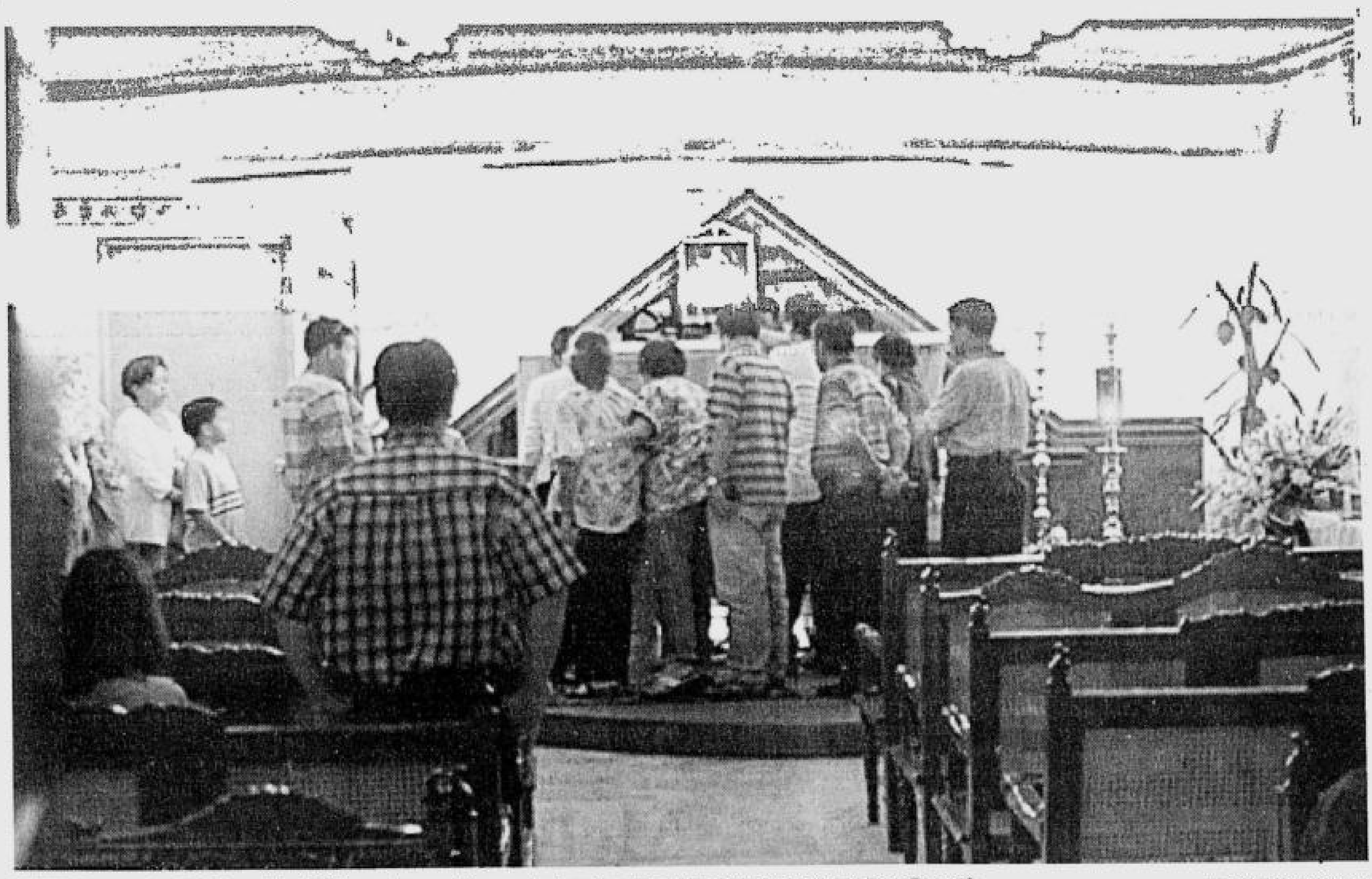
In the end, it was his civilian friends, not his military comrades, who all came to honor him.

"He was a hero, a patriot," Jimenez said of Cervantes.

"His valiant efforts prevented whatever evil or violence some people were plotting against the government," the VACC chair added.

Cervantes, who was integrated into the Army in 1988, was heavily criticized by Lim and other RAM and YOU officers for allegedly misrepresenting himself as YOU spokesperson.

They were particularly angered when Cervantes came out in the open and revealed the alleged plot to destabilize the Macapagal administration.


WHERE were the RAM and the YOU members at Cervantes' wake at the Holy Trinity in Sucat, Parañaque? JIM GUIAO PUNZALAN

'Baron very pissed off with gov't'

(From page A1)

President Macapagal-Arroyo linked Cervantes' killing to destabilization plots and said those planning to "bring down the government" were behind it.

"I condemn in the strongest possible terms the murder of Baron Cervantes, the self-styled spokesperson and claimant cofounder of the Young Officers Union," a grim-faced President said in a special national address telecast about 9 p.m. Tuesday.

She said it was clear that the killers intended to derail the country's progress. She warned the "new termites" against undermining her administration, and urged the public to keep calm and continue supporting the government.

But Sen. Rodolfo Biazon twitted the President for saying that Cervantes' killing could be politically motivated.

"If she knows something, then the people should know what she exactly means," Biazon said yesterday.

National Security Adviser Roilo Golez also dismissed the plot theory, saying over radio that destabilization was not an issue.

Cervantes, a consultant to Golez, died in a hospital on Dec. 31 shortly after he was shot in the nape as he waited outside a drugstore in Pamplona, Las Piñas. He was 35.

In a signed statement he delivered to Pastor "Boy" Saycon of the Council on Philippine Affairs (Copa) hours before he was shot, Cervantes hinted on reorganizing the YOU to push for a "real social reform agenda."

He said a "more broad-based legal and democratically organized organization" composed of ex-members of the YOU and like-minded persons would continue the programs of the military group.

The statement was one of two documents that Cervantes left at Saycon's house on Monday afternoon.

But the source could not say whether the "wake-up" group that Cervantes was reportedly planning to set up was related to his supposed plan to reorganize the YOU.

Cervantes reportedly planned the group to be along the line of the Philippine Consultative Assembly, headed by Linda Montayre, which had been loudly calling on the administration to shape up.

Declined invitation

The source said Cervantes' plan failed to reach the preliminary stages or organization.

"I myself had been declining the (invitation to join the group)," the source said. "I know this administration has a lot of failed promises, but I wouldn't just come out in the open and attack it."

The source said that during their conversations, Cervantes expressed a growing disappointment with the government and disclosed his brewing conflict with other officers of the YOU and the Rebolusyonaryong Alyansang Makabansa (RAM).

"He felt that he had somehow been forgotten by the administration despite his efforts at Edsa," the source said.

But in his letter to Saycon, Cervantes denied speculations that the YOU was plotting to destabilize the Macapagal administration.

"Despite the shortcomings of this administration the same cannot be used as a 'moral' issue to drastically change the leadership," Cervantes wrote.

"We believe that there are still other remedies available to this government to resolve the issues hounding (it)," he added. "The leadership only needs to . . . put these things into motion."

Cervantes also said "legitimate members of the mainstream YOU" ignored the supposed Dec. 24 meeting of the YOU in Puerto Azul, Cavite, wherein a destabilization plot was allegedly discussed.

Saycon said on Tuesday night that he had also received an invitation to the meeting from YOU chair Supt. Rafael Cardeno.

The YOU has since denied involvement in any destabilization plot.

Last day of 2001

In the TV address that she delivered in Filipino and English, the President said those who killed Cervantes were intent on derailing the country's economic recovery and deliberately chose the last day of the year to carry out the murder.

"It is clear that the evildoers do not want us to lift ourselves out of poverty. They want us to suffer more rather than for more Filipinos to progress," she said.

The President declared to the "plotters," whom she described as "termites of society," that "their plans will not succeed."

She cited "two eminent reasons" for this:

- "The Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police have the muscle and the wherewithal to stop and destroy them if they raise arms against the government."
- "The sovereign people will not countenance any attempt to bring down the government, undermine its authority and stop the momentum of economic advancement that we have begun and are determined to pursue."

The President said she had ordered the PNP and National Bureau of Investigation to conduct a thorough investigation of Cervantes' murder, identify the mastermind, and submit a report to her as soon as possible.

She pledged to defend democracy and appealed to the people to remain calm and continue supporting the government against the threats and propaganda of the "new termites."

But in a radio interview, Golez claimed that talks of destabilization were all hot air.

"They're all stories, and they're coming not from us but from others," he said in Filipino. "The issue should not even be discussed because there is no destabilization. Other people just want to rake it up because that is what they want to happen."

Golez, however, acknowledged that Cervantes was one of his consultants.

He described the hiring of the officer as "more of getting (Cervantes') opinion on issues because we don't have an intelligence arm at the National Security Council."

Golez admitted that he had been "talking at length" with Cervantes on the phone days before the officer's killing, but declined to disclose the nature of the conversations.

"I've passed on these matters for proper investigation," he said. "It would be appropriate not to talk about these (so as not to) compromise the investigation."

Too close

Cervantes was killed a few days after military intelligence agents seized 100 blocks of C-4 explosives from Lt. Senior Grade Donn Anthony Miraflor and other Navy commandos whom Sen. Panfilo Lacson supervised when he was concurrent chief of the PNP and the disbanded Presidential Anti-Organized Crime Task Force.

The President did not comment on the recovery of the explosives that, military officials said, could flatten all major military service headquarters in Metro Manila and five other big buildings in Makati City.

But Biazon said the two events could be linked because they happened "within a period of only one week."

He observed that after the explosives were seized from Miraflor, Cervantes surfaced to reveal a meeting in Puerto Azul among alleged coup plotters. Then after Cervantes' disclosure was denied by the RAM-YOU, the officer was killed.

"The confluence of events is too close, and they happened in the middle of coup rumors," he noted.

Biazon also said that "while the country is trying to recover, there are too many silhouettes moving in the shadows."

He added: "In fact, most of these silhouettes are identifiable members of sectors that joined Edsa II."

Biazon pointed out that if there were people who should reveal what they know about Cervantes, "they are Golez and Saycon."

"What is it in Copa that its president would merit receipt of intelligence reports?" the senator said, referring to the documents that Cervantes left in Saycon's house on New Year's Eve. *With reports from Rocky Nazareno*

SAN FERNANDO IS HOST

La Union sparks busy year for chess

GMs Torre, Villamayor, Antonio head participants

THE NATIONAL Chess Federation of the Philippines announced yesterday that an open chess tournament will be held in the City of San Fernando, La Union, on March 3-6.

The event, a joint project of the provincial government of La Union and the city of San Fernando, headed by Governor Victor Ortega and Mayor Mary Jane C. Ortega, respectively, is open to all chess players in the country.

Grandmasters Eugene Torre, Joey Antonio and Bong Villamayor and other international and local rated players are expected to participate in the year's first big chessfest up North.

At stake in the four-day event to be hosted by Mayor Ortega is a cash pot of P176,000. The champion will pocket P50,000 and a trophy.

The first and second runners-up will receive P30,000 and P20,000 plus trophies, respectively, and the rest will be awarded to the fourth up to 20th placers.

Special awards will also be given to the top three players in the following categories—non-master, kiddie, lady and senior players.

Outright national master titles of norm will also be awarded to untitled players based on their performances in the 9-round Swiss system event.

The tournament marks the start of a busy year for chess promised by NCFP president Mat Defensor and NCFP secretary general Sammy Estimo.

Interested participants may inquire from NCFP Region I through engineer Joseph Dumok (tel. 072-242-1164) or call up the NCFP offices at tel. 435-1113 up to 14 for other details.

Guardo to submit Cebu's SEAG bid

THE CEBU City Sports Commission (CCSC) is set to submit to the Philippine Olympic Committee a formal letter of intent to bid for the hosting of the 2005 Southeast Asian Games any time this week.

CCSC chair Jonathan Guardo said yesterday his city, dubbed the "Queen City of the South," is all set for the Games.

"Cebu is almost equal with Manila in terms of sports facilities and other venues for the Games," said Guardo. "We have long studied Cebu's competence in hosting international events."

Guardo said Cebu's bid to host the event will be a big boost to Cebu's tourism industry.

The city has more than 87 hotels/appartelles and 28 beach resorts, among them the internationally renowned Waterfront Mactan and Lahug, Marriot Hotel, Cebu Plaza and Shangri-La.

The city government, according to Guardo, has put across its goal of spending less for the 2005 SEA Games, thus complementing Cebu's ready sports venues.

"If the Arroyo Administration is emphasizing on spending less for the event, Cebu is highly capable with its existing sports facilities and venues, and the best hotel accommodations and restaurants for both the participants and the tourists," Guardo said.

Clijsters sets eyes on Belgium win

CLIJSTERS

PERTH, Australia — The United States and Australia may be favorites for the Hopman Cup tennis final but world fifth-ranked Kim Clijsters thinks her Belgian team has a chance—as long as she doesn't play again like she did Tuesday.

Clijsters, the tournament's highest-ranked female, was sluggish in a 6-4, 6-4 loss to Italy's Francesca Schiavone. But Belgium's Xavier Malisse beat Davide Sanguinetti 6-4, 7-5 and Clijsters and Malisse defeated Schiavone and Sanguinetti 6-3, 6-4 in the deciding mixed doubles to give Belgium a 2-1 win.

Later Tuesday, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario won her singles match over Miroslava Vavrinec of Switzerland 6-2, 6-0 to lead Spain to its second consecutive 3-0 win in the tournament.

Spain's world No. 30 Tommy Robredo ended any chance Switzerland, 0-2, had of successfully defending its 2001 title when he upset Roger Federer 7-6 (7), 6-2 to give Spain a winning 2-0 lead in the match. Sanchez-Vicario and Robredo then defeated Vavrinec and Federer 6-2, 6-3 in the mixed doubles for the sweep.

Federer, the No. 12-ranked player in the world who partnered Martina Hingis to win the event last year, has yet to win a match in the tournament after losing to Australia's Lleyton Hewitt in three sets on Sunday.

Clijsters made 50 unforced errors while Schiavone produced the match of her career. It wasn't until set point that Clijsters, Hewitt's 19-year-old girlfriend, began to find a spark.

She saved seven set points against Schiavone until a one-handed backhand down the line from Schiavone gave Italy the win.

"I was rallying all right, I just couldn't finish off the points," Clijsters said. "It was just the winners that were missing, I had so many chances to finish off the points easily and just made some easy mistakes."

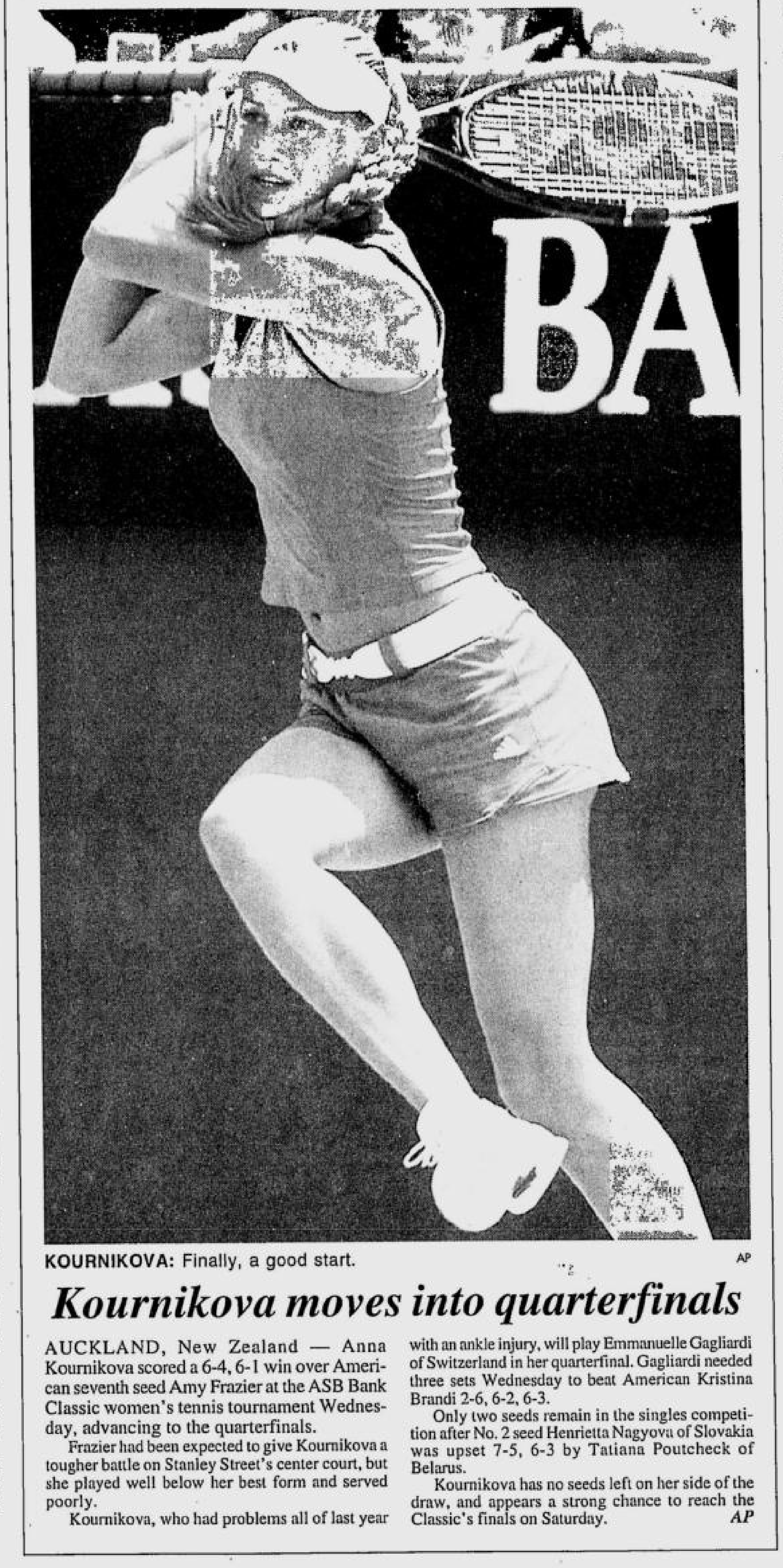
"I think we've got a shot at it," Malisse said of Belgium's chances of making the final. "It's just three matches, if you have a great day and someone else has a bad day it's possible."

Belgium, playing in the same group as the top-seeded United States, takes on the Americans–Jan Michael Gambill and Monica Seles–in the final round-robin match on Friday.

Clijsters said the mixed doubles event made predicting winners difficult because the best singles players did not necessarily make the best doubles players.

"I think we match up pretty well," Clijsters said. "Xavier is really handy, he serves well and has good returns and I think we should go all right together."

On Wednesday, Australia, 1-0, plays Argentina, 0-1, while the United States, which won its opening match Monday, plays Italy. *AP*


KOURNIKOVA: Finally, a good start. AP

Kournikova moves into quarterfinals

AUCKLAND, New Zealand — Anna Kournikova scored a 6-4, 6-1 win over American seventh seed Amy Frazier at the ASB Bank Classic women's tennis tournament Wednesday, advancing to the quarterfinals.

Frazier had been expected to give Kournikova a tougher battle on Stanley Street's center court, but she played well below her best form and served poorly.

Kournikova, who had problems all of last year with an ankle injury, will play Emmanuelle Gagliardi of Switzerland in her quarterfinal. Gagliardi needed three sets Wednesday to beat American Kristina Brandi 2-6, 6-2, 6-3.

Only two seeds remain in the singles competition after No. 2 seed Henrietta Nagyova of Slovakia was upset 7-5, 6-3 by Tatiana Poutcheck of Belarus.

Kournikova has no seeds left on her side of the draw, and appears a strong chance to reach the Classic's finals on Saturday. *AP*

Assa Abloy leads Volvo

AUCKLAND, New Zealand—Swedish yacht Assa Abloy had a lead of about 50 nautical miles over Amer Sports One on Wednesday on the third leg of the Volvo Ocean Race to Auckland from Sydney.

Assa Abloy won line honors last Saturday in the annual Sydney to Hobart race, the first section of the third leg for the eight Volvo race competitors.

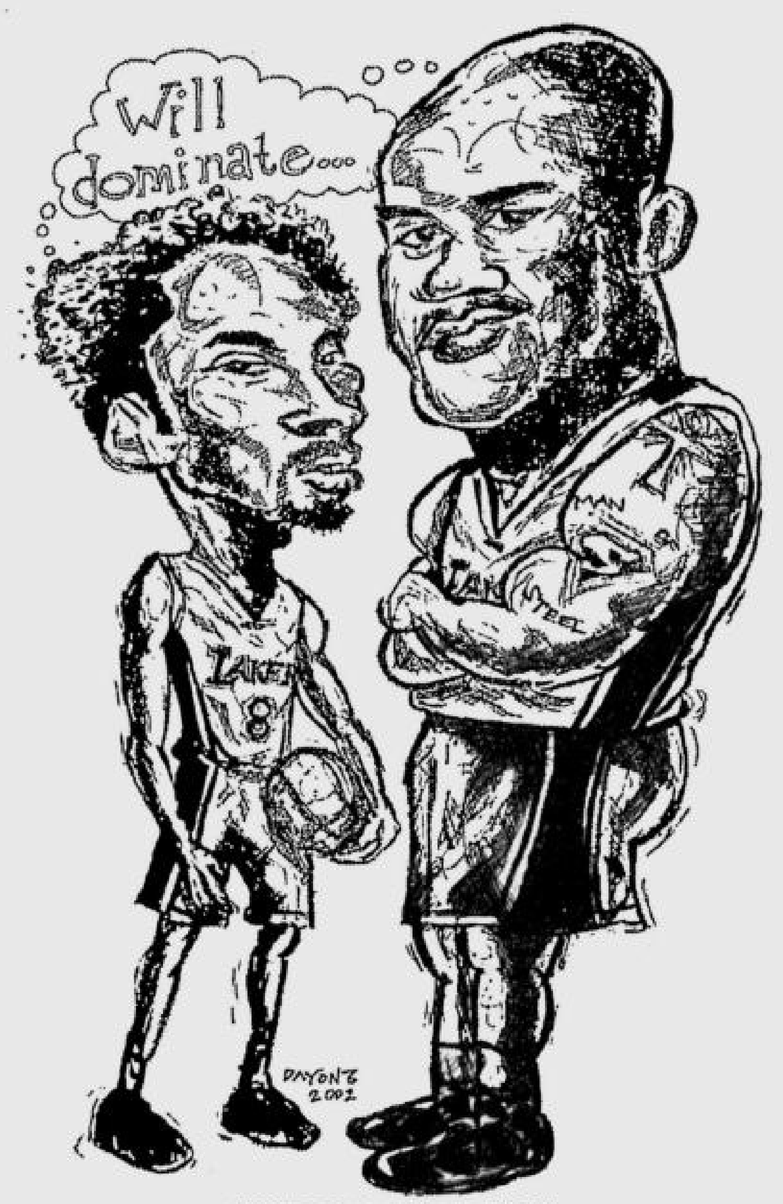
Based on computer projections, Assa Abloy was not expected to reach Auckland until Thursday night, about six hours later than originally expected due to changing winds. Amer Sports One was expected to be several hours behind Assa Abloy.

Illbruck, which won the first two legs and is the overall race leader, is in third place, followed by News Corp in fourth and Tyco in fifth, with only five nautical miles separating the three.

Djuice was in sixth place after losing ground by choosing a more southerly route across the Tasman Sea.

Amer Sports Too, which had to stay behind in Hobart to make repairs to first a broken forestay and then a rudder, is in seventh place and not expected to reach Auckland until Sunday.

The eighth boat in the Volvo race, Sweden's SEB, had to pull out of the third leg after rudder damage during the Hobart race. It is expected to take part in the fourth leg that leaves Auckland for Rio de Janeiro on Jan. 27. *AP*



ILLUSTRATION/DAYONG J. MENDOZA

McInnis leads Clippers past Blazers; Pippen lameduck

LOS ANGELES—Clippers guard Jeff McInnis scored 23 points Tuesday as Los Angeles defeated the Portland Trail Blazers, 112-97, in a matchup of struggling teams.

The Clippers snapped a season-high, three-game losing streak. Portland lost its season-high fifth game in succession — its longest stretch since losing five consecutive games from March 6-14 when the Blazers faded down the stretch.

McInnis, who had nine assists, led seven players in double figures on a night when the Clippers shot 58 percent and won without starters Lamar Odom and Michael Olowokandi. Odom missed his third consecutive game with a sprained right wrist; Olowokandi had food poisoning.

Quentin Richardson added 19 points, Darius Miles had 17 and Elton Brand had 16 for the Clippers, who are 6-5 without Odom.

The return of Scottie Pippen after missing 10 games with an injured right knee didn't boost the Blazers, who lost twice to the Clippers at Staples Center last season. He had nine points and nine assists in 30 minutes.

Damon Stoudamire led the Blazers with 25 points, including 13 in the third quarter when Portland cut an 18-point deficit to six. Down 72-54, the Blazers used full-court pressure to spark a 9-0 run in which Stoudamire hit a 3-pointer off a steal by Ruben Patterson.

Stoudamire scored eight of Portland's 10 points late in the quarter to get to 81-75, but they would get no closer the rest of the game.

Miles scored seven of the Clippers' first eight points to start the fourth quarter and give them a 96-81 lead. *AP*

Wang Zhizhi stamps out

WANG Zhizhi of the Dallas Mavericks will be honored with a set of legal tender stamps. It will be unveiled at the NB Store on Fifth Avenue in New York City today. "It is indeed a great honor," said Wang, "Not everyone is privileged to have a stamp made for them." Wang, one of China's all-time greatest basketball players, became the first player from China to play in the NBA when he joined the Dallas Mavericks in April 2001.

NBA cager beats wife, arrested

MILWAUKEE — Darvin Ham of the Milwaukee Bucks was arrested on what police said was suspicion of violence against his wife.

The 6-foot-7, 240-pound (2-meter, 108-kilogram) forward was cited on suspicion of domestic violence-battery, a misdemeanor, at about midnight Monday at a Milwaukee home, Lt. John Andrews said. Andrews was unsure who made the report and did not know the circumstances of what happened.

Ham paid a $500 cash bail and was released Tuesday, a Milwaukee County jail booking clerk said.

"I am very sorry about the situation and for the anguish and embarrassment this has caused my wife and our entire family, as well as the Bucks organization, my teammates and fans," Ham said in a statement released by the team Tuesday.

Ham called the incident "not representative of my character" and promised to work with his family to rectify the situation.

"My wife means the world to me and I will not let one lapse in judgment overcome my love and commitment to her and to our children," he said.

Bucks GM Ernie Grunfeld said he has spoken with Ham and is confident he will take the steps needed to resolve the situation. *AP*

On hitting

SPECTATOR

Al S. Mendoza

IMAGINE a 6-foot-7, 240-pound cager hitting his wife. Either a slap or a punch, surely that hurts.

Darvin Ham of the NBA's Milwaukee Bucks is in a fix right now on suspicion he hit his wife. He's out on bail ($500).

In a statement, Ham said: "My wife means the world to me and I will not let one lapse in judgment overcome my love and commitment to her and to our children."

One lapse in judgment. That, sure, is an admission of guilt. Will Ham be forgiven by his wife?

If statistics is to be believed, he'll be forgiven.

But American law is unique. In some states in America, the police will pursue charges of wife-beating against the hubby even after the victim had abandoned the case.

A feminist friend of mine shocked me once with this revelation: In the Philippines, many wives are victims of battery. Unfortunately, most of them do not have the courage to bring their cases into the open. They'd rather keep it to themselves than report the matter to authorities. Worst, most don't have the heart to leave their husbands.

Why do some athletes hit their wives?

Pressure brought on by the need to perform well on a consistent basis?

Boxer Mike Tyson was once accused of repeatedly punching his wife, actress Robin Givens. In one violent outburst, Givens "flew" from a Tyson burst, crashing into and breaking a glass wall in the couple's living room. Tyson is short of temper; remember that Year of the Ear when he chewed off a good chunk of Evander Holyfield's ear during a world heavyweight title match? He has never recovered from that ignominy.

Golfer John Daly is another example. When he was still an alcoholic, Daly, a former British Open champion, would easily fly into a rage and most often than not, his wife got a beating. Daly says he's been reformed after undergoing rehabilitation.

BLAST FROM THE PAST

TODAY in 1993, Marlcris Fernandez beat Marisue Jacutin, 6-3, 6-3, to win the girls' title of the International Tennis Federation East Asian Juniors at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Minnesota's $100-million man NBN 4 show feature tonight

THE NBA's $100-million man, superstar Kevin Garnett, makes a rare appearance on Philippine television tonight when his Minnesota Timberwolves battle the tough Milwaukee Bucks at 10 on NBN 4.

The 25-year-old Garnett, who joined the NBA straight out of high school in 1995 and signed a seven-year $100-million contract with Minnesota in 1998, has led the Timberwolves to a 20-9 win-loss record (Milwaukee's record is 18-10, second-best in the Eastern Conference). Garnett has averaged 20.9 points, 12-4 rebounds and 5.4 assists a game for the season.

The game will be played on Minnesota's homecourt, where they have an 11-2 record, second only to the Los Angeles Lakers in the NBA.

Local fans will get to watch the Timberwolves only twice this season on the Solar telecast of the NBA. The last time will be this Sunday, when Minnesota plays the Atlanta Hawks, 9 p.m. on NBN 4.

PSA POSTHUMOUS AWARDS

Eduque, 7 others honored

EDUQUE

THE PHILIPPINE Sportswriters Association will confer posthumous awards on eight sports personalities who passed away last year in one of the highlights of the 2001 PSA Annual Awards at the Holiday Inn on Jan. 11.

To be honored during the traditional Awards Night are former Philippine Olympic Committee president Nereo C. Andolong, PBA players Alfie Almario and Larry Mumar, national coaches Valentin 'Tito' Eduque and Felicissimo "Fely" Fajardo, Philippine Football Federation secretary general Chris Monfort, Asian sprint queen Inocencia Solis and boxing promoter Armando Besa.

Romy Kintanar, TV sports commentator and broadcaster, will also receive a posthumous award for his excellence in sports broadcasting and journalism.

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo has been invited to be the guest of honor in the awards rites of the country's oldest news organization, which was founded in 1949.

The Awards Night will be hosted by sportscaster Noli Eala. It is sponsored by Photokina Marketing and supported by the Philippine Sports Commission.

Andolong, who was also chair-general manager of the Philippine Charity Sweepstakes Office and president of the National Press Club, was reporter of the Manila Chronicle, winning the NPC-Stanvac journalism award in 1958.

He handled a number of national sports associations and later became president of the POC. He was an all around sportsman, proficient in golf, tennis, pistol shooting, bowling, water skiing, sky diving and scuba-diving. After his retirement two decades ago he remained a golf enthusiast and sports lover.

Almario, member of the San Miguel Beer team for five years until his retirement, was a member of the national youth team that won the Asian Youth championships in 1982.

Mumar played for Utex, Seven Up, Filmanbank, CDCP and Great Taste in the PBA.

Eduque was coach of the Philippine team to the qualifying tournament to the 1964 Olympics and was PBA coach for Concepcion Industries, and Manila Beer, winning a bagful of titles for Yco and Mariwasa.

Fajardo was team captain of the 1938 NCAA champion Letran Knights, team captain of the Philippine team to the 1948 Olympics, and was coach of the Philippine team to Helsinki Games in 1952.

Solis won the PSA Athlete of the Year in 1958 when she won the Asian Games gold medal in the century dash.

Monfort was also president of the NCRAA Football Association and formed an ambitious football program among the youth in the NCR while Besa had promoted a number of local and international title bouts.

Coceres skips Mercedes tilt

KAPALUA, Hawaii — Jose Coceres of Argentina, a two-time winner on the PGA Tour last year, broke his arm playing soccer with friends and will be out for at least six weeks.

Coceres and Phil Mickelson will be the only players to miss the season-opening Mercedes Championships, a winners-only field that starts Thursday at Kapalua.

That leaves 32 players in the field at Kapalua, including Tiger Woods, David Duval and defending champion Jim Furyk.

Mickelson previously told tournament officials he wanted to be home with his family during the holidays. The Mickelsons have a 2-month-old daughter.

Andrada foes vow to save 'dying' Philippine tennis after elections

BY MARC ANTHONY REYES

PROMISING to inject fresh blood to the "dying" Philippine tennis, Children's Tennis Workshop president Jovy Mamawal yesterday said his ticket is raring to take the challenge of Philippine Tennis Association chief Buddy Andrada in the election for regional vice presidents on Jan. 5.

There will be 15 RVP seats to be contested during the elections which will be held simultaneously in Philta's 15 regions. The winners will then elect the new Philta president next year.

"We are definitely pushing through with our campaign," said Mamawal, "because we want to show the incumbent Philta officials that we want change in the leadership and save the sport from further deterioration."

Mamawal lamented the sad state of Philippine tennis which has been lagging behind Southeast Asian neighbors the past decade.

The country's Davis Cup team, he added, just got back to Group 2 from the Group 3 where the Philippines was bundled with countries like Bangladesh, Tajikistan, Laos and Afghanistan.

"Our immediate concern is strengthen the national teams from the Davis Cup team down to the junior squads," said Mamawal, who stressed that the Philippines used to have strong showing in the Southeast Asian Games but could only show two bronzes in Kuala Lumpur last year.

"Then, we will revive the regional inter-club tournaments, which have been neglected by Andrada since he took the position in 1987."

Mamawal said interclub tourney is the main vein of grassroots development because club members themselves pay for the campaigns of their respective bets, who are culled from different parts of the country.

He added that corporate sponsors have already thrown their support to his group but are just waiting for the "new Philta administration."

"We will never allow Philta to run out of funds again," said Mamawal, who cited the pullout of chief back-roller Milo from the age-group competitions due to conflicts in Philta policies.

Mamawal also bared their plan to amend a provision in the constitution allowing seven appointed executive officials to cast their votes for the Philta presidency, saying it gives undue advantage to the incumbent president.

Andrada has been Philta president from 1987 and his term ends Dec. 31 this year. He vowed to run for another term.

Age-group netfest listing going on

REGISTRATION is now going on for the 13th Andrada Cup Age Group Tennis Championships slated Jan. 5-6 and 11-13 at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Players may contact Loida Mallare at the Philta office (tel. 525-6434). Entry fee is P200.

Events on tap are boys' and girls' 18-under, 16-under, 14-under, 12-under and unisex 10-under divisions. A player may join two categories.

Winners in this Group 2 event held in honor of Philta president Salvador Andrada will receive 120 points.

Camaso inks 3-year deal with Pals worth ₱10.8M

BY JUNE NAVARRO

FOR the next three years, Don Camaso will be joining Asi Taulava and Victor Pablo in their search for Talk N Text's first legitimate championship title.

The 28-year-old Camaso, considered a small forward at 6-foot-6 and potentially one of the best shooting guards in the PBA, yesterday inked a three-year deal with the Phone Pals.

Sources said Camaso would earn roughly P300,000 a month or P10.8 million for three years. Camaso earned P3 million last season.

"There's definitely an increase including the perks such as the won-game incentives and placement bonuses but not that much," said Talk N Text manager Frankie Lim, a former PBA hotshot who played for Alaska Milk in the '80s and '90s.

Talk N Text, which invested a lot and built its core on the 6-foot-9 Taulava and Pablo, will continue to have a decent three-point sniper in Camaso, whose leaping ability could baffle everyone inside the shaded area.

Taulava still has a remaining four-year contract with the Phone Pals, while Pablo, who enjoys a maximum P.5 million salary every month, would stay until the 2004 PBA season.

The Phone Pals captured the Centennial Cup in 1998 at a time when the league sent a team to the Bangkok Asian Games.

Acquired from the now-defunct Manila Metrostars in 2000, the 200-lb Camaso averaged 10 points per outing and 4.1 rebounds a night last year although he never really mixed it up inside the paint.

Lim also bared that management is still looking for a replacement for former head coach Louie Alas.

He added team officials are considering a handful of foreign coaches including former NBA player Johnny Neumann, who will be calling the shots for Lebanon in the Asian Games in September.

"But he won't be able to sign a contract and join the team until after the Asian Games so we have to look for other possibilities," said Lim.

CAMASO

FILE PHOTO

RACING TIPS

AT SAN LAZARO BY MR. 999

Race 1—1. Kontra Todo 2. Tour de Force

Race 2—1. Deputy Royale 2. Aya's Star 3. Tumataginting 4. College Gem

Race 3—1. Lucky Strike 2. Lord Conqueror

Race 4—1. Shuttle's Rianne 2. Two Thumbs Up/Ong Bee 3. Forest Dancer

Race 5—1. Walang Hanggan/Redding Drive 2. Carlo's Charm 3. Silver Print 4. Kathy Rose 5. El Magnifico 6. Imus Emperor

Race 6—1. Snake Dancer 2. Hitman 3. Fire Mouth 4. Impeccable 5. Mighty Swift

Race 7—1. Senor Raggaas 2. En Carta/Real Charm 3. Green Buck 4. Ann's Magic

Race 8—1. Music City 2. Suterian Era 3. Charmingly Chit 4. Love Triangle 5. Rainmaker 6. Baptism of Fire

SPORTS ON TV

COMPILED BY LORENZO MANGUIAT

POOL: World Pool League 2001 at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. (r) on ESPN

Rack 'Em Up - Mosconi Cup Finals at 7 p.m. on ESPN

BASKETBALL: NBA – Milwaukee Bucks vs Minnesota Timberwolves at 10 p.m. on NBN 4

US NCAA - Arkansas vs Memphis at 12 midnight on ESPN

GOLF: PGA Tour Championship, Final Round at 2 p.m. (r) on Star Sports

HOCKEY: NHL - Anaheim Mighty Ducks vs Detroit Red Wings at 9 a.m. (r – 4 p.m.) on ESPN

BASEBALL: Classic's Baseball Game at 9:30 p.m. on ESPN

BOXING: World Class Championship - Israel Vasquez vs Eddy Saenz at 10 p.m. on Star Sports

SOCCER: English Premier Football League - Newcastle United vs Manchester United at 7 a.m., West Ham United vs Leeds United at 12 noon (r) on Star Sports

Tiger 5s 2001, Day 3 Highlights at 11 a.m. (r – 7:30 p.m.) on Star Sports

Futbol Mundial at 5:30 p.m. on Star Sports

BOWLING: CGU Asian Bowling Tour, Men's Highlights at 6 p.m. on Star Sports

MOTOR SPORTS: Max Power at 9 a.m. (r – 8:30 p.m.) on Star Sports

Total Dakar 2002, Day 5 Highlights at 10 a.m. (r), Day 6 Highlights at 9:30 p.m. on Star Sports

Schedules subject to change without prior notice.

Lim bags 3rd under-14 title

TOP seed Arithmetico Lim of Chiang Kai Shek School won his third straight boys' 14-under title last Monday in the Philta/Head-Penn Tennis Tour Masters at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Center.

Lim, champion in the Manzano Cup and Milo Juniors, was leading 7-6 (7-1) in his final match against second seed Ed Angelo Diez of University of Mindanao when the Davao-based netter retired at the start of the second set due to foot blister.

Earlier, second pick Yannick Guba of St. Benilde-Bacolod stunned Joseph Arcilla, 6-1, 6-4, to pocket his second consecutive boys' 18-under title.

Third seed Janji Soquino and top pick Russell Arcilla Jr. were also crowned champions in their respective divisions.

Soquino nailed the boys' 16-under title over second seed Nestor Celestino Jr. of San Beda, 6-1, 6-2, while Arcilla struggled past unranked Gerard Michael Ngo of Lourdes School, 6-3, 4-6, 7-2, to clinch the boys' 12-under trophy.

Zoleta siblings Bien and Bambi of Mary Hill College-Lucena also scored double victories.

Girls' 16-under No. 2 Bien struggled past fourth seed Alyssa Anne Labay of Bacolod, 6-2, 2-6, 13-11, in the finals. She also won the 14-under title over third seed Denise Culaba, 6-2, 6-2.

The top-seeded Bambi scored a 6-0, 7-6 (4) win over second pick Jessic aAgra of Colegio de San Agustin to claim the girls' 12-under title and annexed the unisex 10-under title after pulling off a 6-3, 6-4 victory over Ngo.

The girls' 18-under title went to Anja Peters, who beat Ivy de Castro of Miriam College, 7-5, 6-3.

Mountain Dew tops hockey league

GUIDE Sanmocte scored three goals and issued an assist as Mountain Dew Yellow Gold nipped 7-Up, 6-5, to take Game 3 of their finals and capture the 2nd season of Pepsi Cup In-Line Roller Hockey League recently at GameworX fourth level of Festival Supermall in Alabang.

Sanmocte's heroics were complemented by Allison Lapiz who scored two goals and Eric Rivera, who added one for Mountain Dew, which dropped Game 1 but won the next two games of the best-of-three series.

"Defense was the key to our victory, I think at the start of the ballgame we already controlled the tempo of the game," said Sanmocte. "We were able to control their offensive plays because of our goalie Noel Subala."

Yellow Gold team captain Vic Rufino, Vince Alimurang, Earl Sidney Balansag, Red Karunungan and Jeffrey Roxas also performed well for the winning squad.

"We would like to congratulate Mountain Dew Yellow Gold for winning the title and showing their skills that helped generate interest in the sport of roller hockey," said GameworX president Jesus "Jun" Avecilla.

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Oregon rips Colorado, 38-16

TEMPE, Arizona—The dazzling Ducks of Oregon made their case for a share of the national championship—and then some. Now as far as they're concerned, it's "Go Nebraska!" In an impressive end to his college career, Joey Harrington threw for 350 yards and four touchdowns as No. 2 Oregon routed No. 3 Colorado 38-16 on Tuesday in the Fiesta Bowl. "We made a statement today," Harrington said. "Thirty-eight unanswered points and shut down the hottest team in the country. *AP*

SPORTS

Al S. Mendoza, Editor **Edwin M. Villanueva**, Assistant Editor

Baseball clinic at Rizal

OSCAR Marcelino will hold a two-day baseball clinic today and tomorrow at the Rizal Memorial Baseball Stadium from 1-5 p.m. Marcelino, a member of the Major League Baseball International Coach Envoy for Europe, was requested by Richard Dell, MLBI Coach Envoy for Asia, to assist the national team in their training during his visit to the Philippines. The clinic is being held in coordination with the Philippine Amateur Baseball Association under Hector Navasero.

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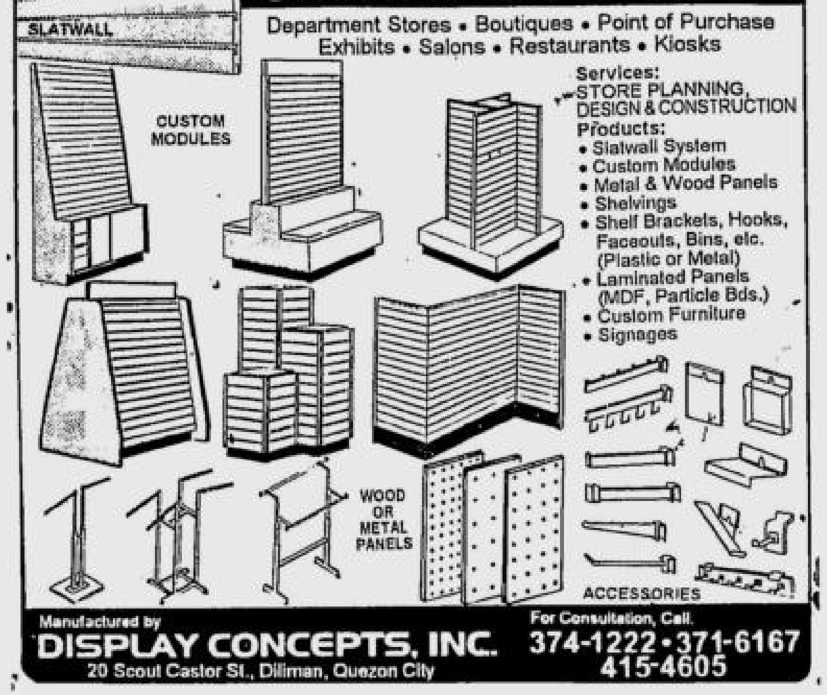

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PBA BOARD MEETING

FedEx fate tackled today

By June Navarro

FORGET about Airfreight 2001 Inc. Think about the Lina Group of Companies.

To avoid the hassles of corporate name changes and present a better picture of its capability as a team in the PBA, Airfreight president Lito Alvarez decided to use the Lina Group of Companies when they make their presentation before the PBA Board of Governors today.

Instead of only Airfreight, the exclusive carrier of Federal Express in the country, Alvarez said eight companies under LGC would be involved in the purchase of the Tanduay PBA franchise.

Companies listed under LGC are U-Freight Phils., a forwarder and brokerage firm; Top Rank 2100, a company involved in customs brokerage; Integrated Waste Management Inc., makers of Portalet and medical incinerators; Corporate Air Ink, maintains charter operations for the Subic to Manila route for FedEx;

Cargo House, a firm that maintains warehouses inside the Naia and Kalibo, Aklan airport; Lina Hein Trading Warehouse; U-Ocean, Airfreight's counterpart in the sea; and Airfreight 2001 Inc.

According to a PBA board representative, the approval of LGC as the 10th member of the league is almost certain barring any major setbacks.

What will really be decided on, the board member said, is whether LGC would be allowed to bring some of the players of its choice and be treated as an expansion squad similar with Tanduay and Red Bull.

In 1999, Tanduay was allowed to elevate five of its cagers from the PBL, similar to the concession given to Red Bull in the 2000 PBA season.

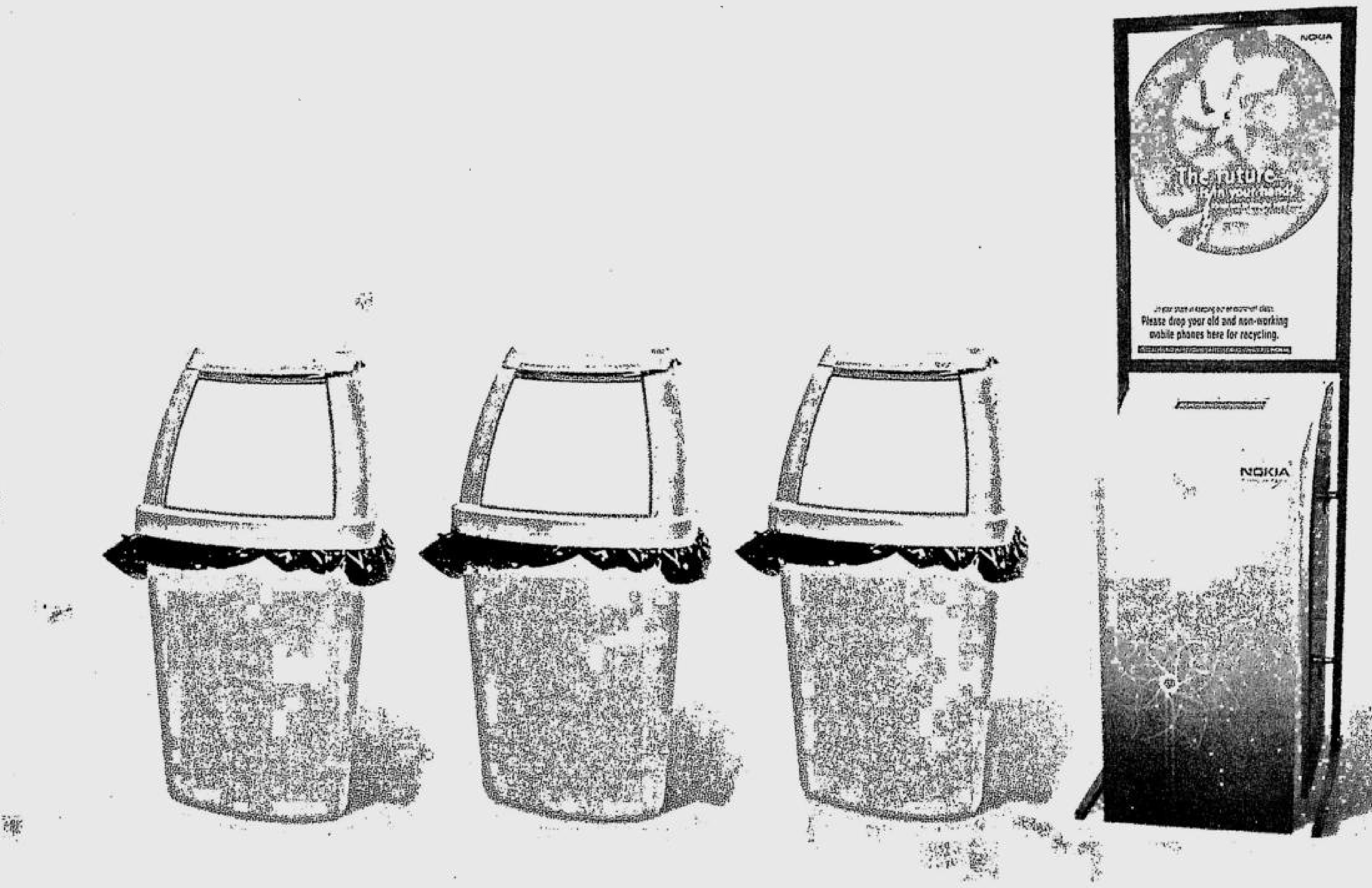
Tanduay reportedly sold its PBA franchise for P75 million but sources said LGC purchased the franchise a little over P100 million including the contracts of the players absorbed by the Bert Lina-owned firm.

As agreed upon, LGC will cough up P25 million as down payment and shell out P10 million in the 2002, 2003 and 2004 PBA seasons before paying the P20-million balance at the start of the 2005 PBA season.

Alvarez said the fate of the players, including Tanduay head coach Derick Pumaren, hinges on the outcome of today's meeting at the Manila Golf Club.

Also to be tackled in the 5 p.m. gathering is the possibility of elevating Chris Clay and Jeffrey Flowers to the PBA without undergoing the annual draft set for Jan. 13.

BERNARDINO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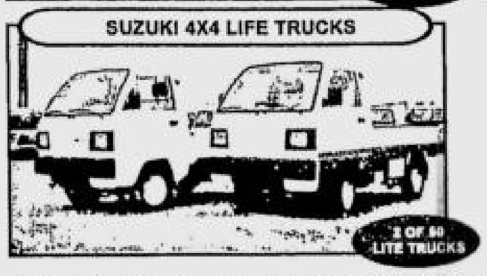

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NBI has witnesses who saw Strawberry killed

NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation Director Reynaldo Wycoco said the bureau has two "very vital" witnesses who could shed light on who actually fired the shots that killed the former child actress Strawberry, Anouk Baldo in real life. Wycoco said one of the witnesses gave a "specific" description of what happened and positively identified the man who fired the shots. The NBI chief added the witnesses and results of ballistic tests will be turned over to the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group. *Philip Tubeza*

METRO

LOUIE C. CAMINO, Editor

Dead on New Year's Day

TEN men ganged up and shot dead parking attendant Ernesto B. Marborang, 19, in a street rumble about 1 a.m. on Jan. 1. Marborang, of Area D, Gate 17, Parola Compound, Tondo, and some of his friends were on their way to Gate 15 when the unidentified men appeared, SPO1 David Tuason said. The suspects, armed with different kinds of weapons, attacked Marborang and his companions, firing on the victims when they tried to escape. Marborang was shot in the back. Bystanders took the victim to the Gat Andres Bonifacio Hospital, but they were too late. *Philip Tubeza*

RIZAL DAY BOMBING SUSPECTS

'We know where they are'

BY PHILIP C. TUBEZA

ALL the National Bureau of Investigation needs are the warrants to spring an arrest of eight suspects positively identified as the ones who made and planted the bombs during the Rizal Day bombings last year.

NBI Director Reynaldo Wycoco said the bureau is just waiting

for the justice department prosecution panel to resolve its preliminary investigation on the bombings.

"The case is now for resolution. Once we get the arrest warrants, we'll nab them. We know where they are," Wycoco said.

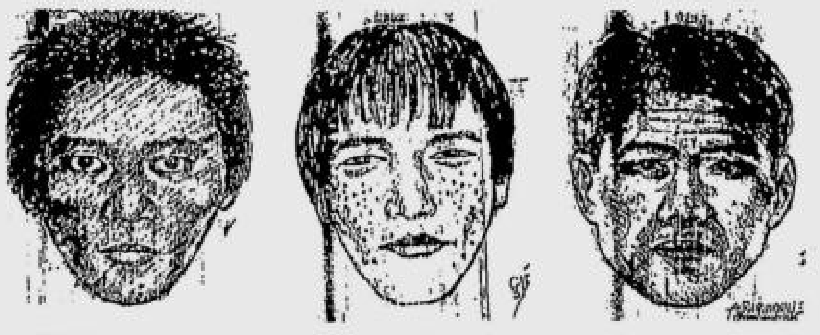
Wycoco identified the suspects as Hadji Onos, alias Mokles, a Moro Islamic Liberation Front member who is an explosive and demolition expert; a Col. Efren Torres, Sammy Arinday, Amir Dimaampo, Salvin Camama, Ibrahim Guindolongan, Robertp Onyot, alias Berto; and Rogelio Cagadas.

Lawyer Elfren Meneses, head of the NBI Anti-Fraud and Computer Crimes Division and the Rizal bombing investigation's chief, said the suspects acted as mercenaries for another group who wanted to destabilize the Estrada administration.

The bombing at the Blumentritt Light Rail Transit station left 11 dead and 54 people injured, Wycoco said.

The NBI has seven witnesses, four of them were LRT passengers and the remaining three were among those who helped prepare the bombs at Marantao Lodge in Quiapo, he added.

Besides the LRT bombing, there were also explosions at the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, near the Dusit Hotel in Makati, in an Edsan bus in Cubao, and at Plaza Fergusun in front of the US Embassy.



HERE are the sketches of three bombing suspects.

The plot was allegedly hatched a month before the bombings and the culprits were promised P20,000 each for their participation.

Wycoco said Onos and Arinday were the "ground commanders" of the bombers. An LRT passenger said he saw Onos leave the bag that exploded inside the LRT coach. Onos allegedly alighted at the LRT Tayuman station.

The Col. Torres, between 55 and 60, acted as the middleman between the group and the bombing masterminds. Wycoco said his men are still trying to find out his real identity.

Arinday, 40 to 45-years-old and 5'5" in height, also gave Onos money to recruit money for the bombing blitz.

Dimaampo, 30, was Onos' companion in Manila. Onyot and Cagadas were seen with Elmer Diamla in a meeting at Antipolo City.

Diamla was arrested in November 2000 trying to enter Malacañang Palace armed with bombs. He was also positively identified as one of the bombers of a Cagayan De Oro mall.

The remaining two suspects, Camama and Guindolongan, acted as partners. Guindolongan, also an MILF member, was identified as the man who planted the bomb at Naia, near the Centennial Air cargo parking lot.

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THURSDAY, JANUARY 03 912-8983

Bolt-Cutter Gang takes wrong road, falls with loot

ERIK ARAZAS

CAUGHT red-handed with mound of assorted jewelry taken from a pawnshop, robbers are presented to media by the police.

BY PHILIP C. TUBEZA

THEY were headed for a good time with P1 million in loot but fell after again literally taking the wrong path.

Manila police yesterday nabbed eight robbers, believed to be members of the dreaded Bolt-Cutter Gang, hours after they broke into a pawnshop in Cavite and drove into a one-way street in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

Police identified the suspects as Reynaldo Bestino, 40, of Sta. Maria, Pangasinan; Eduardo Noligan, 32, of Cervantes, Ilocos Sur; Roy Seles, 21, of Pakak-Pakak, Pangasinan; Marvin Valdez, 24, of Cervantes, Ilocos Sur.

The others were Rudy Lumiban, 30, of Aliliw, Ilocos Sur; Albert Baowan, 26, of Madela, Quirino Province; Pilo Bagtingan, 45, of Saitan, Pangasinan; and Rey Flores, 39, of San Mateo, Isabela.

Besides the P1 million worth of jewelry that the robbers took from the M.A. Jaro Pawnshop in Dasmariñas, Cavite, police also recovered a cal .45 pistol (SN-653008) with one magazine and six rounds of ammunition from the culprits.

Investigators also confiscated the culprits' bolt cutting equipment: two acetylene tanks, two acetylene regulators, and an acetylene torch.

Police said the suspects were arrested around 3 a.m. yesterday at the corner of Paterno and Evangelista streets in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

The suspects were on board a jeep (with plate number PWK-464) driven by a certain Ricky Laurio. The driver, who plied the Dasmariñas-Baclaran route, said he was promised P700 for a ride from Dasmariñas, Cavite to Manila.

The suspects flagged down the jeep at the corner of Congressional Road and Aguinaldo Highway in Cavite after stealing the jewelry from the pawnshop allegedly owned by a former Dasmariñas mayor.

When the suspects reached Sta. Cruz, they made the wrong turn on Evangelista Street, a one-way street.

Police ordered them to stop, inspected their belongings and found the gun, bolt-cutting equipment, and four traveling bags that contained the jewelry.

The suspects are detained at the Western Police District.

▩ They also dream who live in a cart A18

▩ Mon Tulfo: Japanese on billboard is wanted in Tokyo A18

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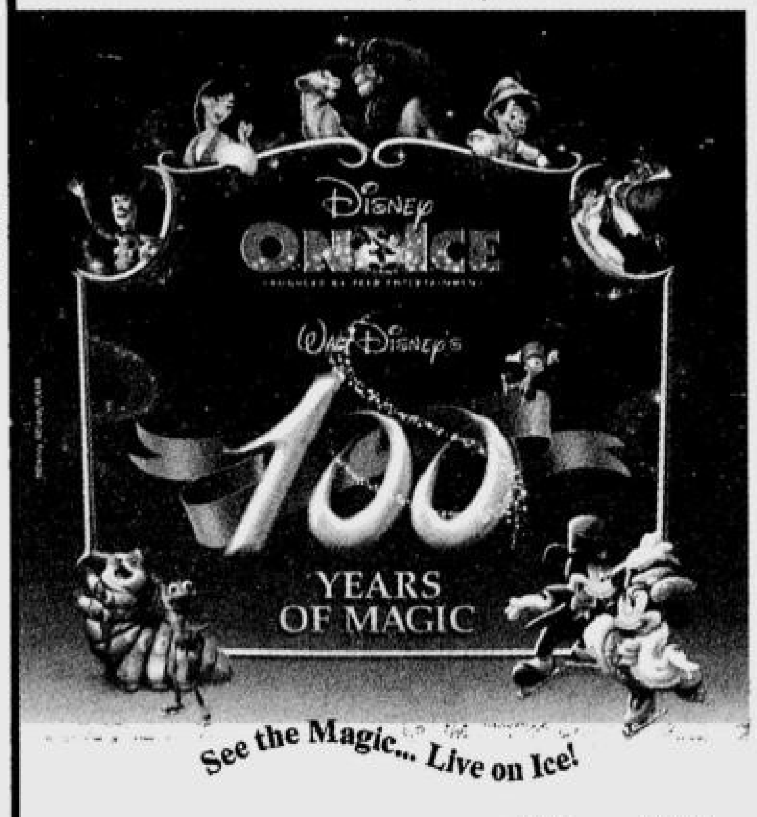

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Nida suspects still in RP

NATIONAL Bureau of Investigation Director Reynaldo Wycoco yesterday dispelled fears that the suspects who killed Nida Blanca have fled the country during the holidays.

"They're still here," Wycoco told reporters yesterday.

He said he had deployed nine NBI teams to investigate the case and make sure that the killers and their mastermind do not escape.

Wycoco said there is enough circumstantial evidence to tie the suspects to Blanca's killing.

"We're just looking for more evidence that would corroborate the circumstantial evidence," Wycoco said.

Lawyer Ricardo Diaz, NBI spokesperson for the Blanca investigation, earlier said the NBI would use the circumstantial evidence to pin down the suspects if the bureau fails to find witnesses who saw the killing.

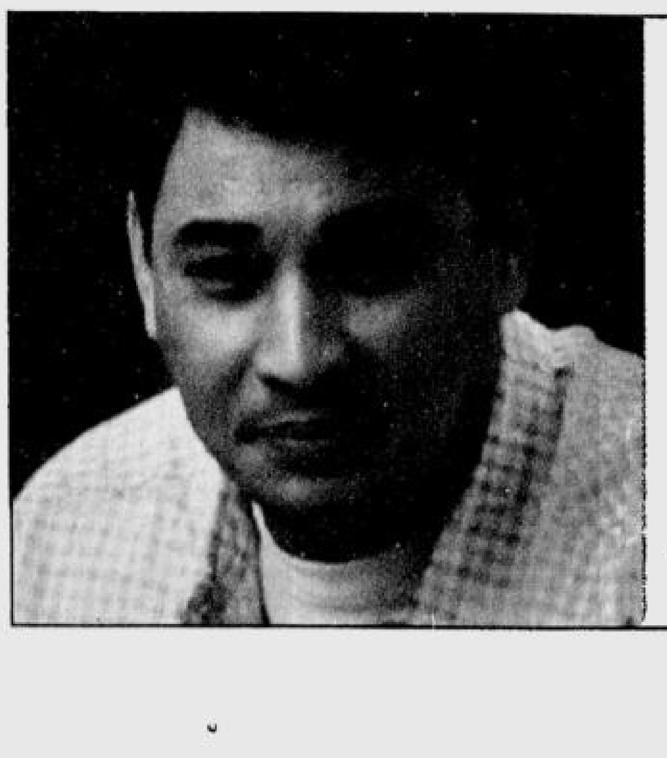
The popular actress was found dead inside her Nissan sedan at the Atlanta Centre building in San Juan on the morning of Nov. 7.

Wycoco said the bureau's "New Year" wish is for Blanca's husband, Rod Strunk, to take the lie detector test.

"I appeal to Mr. Strunk; it is our New Year wish for him to be more forthcoming and to undergo the polygraph test," he said.

He said the NBI continues to make significant progress in the killing, adding that agents are still verifying "new motives" in the murder.

"We are not facing a blank wall," Wycoco said, adding that he could not divulge more details because it would jeopardize the investigation. *Philip Tubeza*



"I could no longer live the lie. Sometimes there's beauty in telling the truth... and peace in accepting the truth."

Sensitive Gerry, played by Ricky Davao, harbours dark secrets which prevent him from achieving self-fulfillment and following his true destiny.

A film by Laurice Guillen

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OPENS ON JANUARY 16

‘Bank veep’ running circles around cops

By Philip C. Tubeza

THE "BANK vice president" struck again.

A member of the notorious Ativan Gang, who pretended to be a Citibank executive equipped with calling cards, robbed an Australian tourist in Intramuros, Manila.

Police believed the same culprit robbed an Indian tourist, also in Intramuros, three weeks ago.

Victim Robert John Freilich, 56, currently staying at the Manila Hotel, said two men robbed him while he was sightseeing inside Intramuros, said investigator SPO3 Cecilo T. Sacorum, of the Western Police District's general assignment section.

The suspects took Freilich's Panasonic DS28 Camcorder, 40 Australian dollars, P1,200 in cash, and a pair of prescription glasses, Sacorum said.

The victim described the alleged bank executive as about 50 years old, 5-foot-7, and fair complexioned. The suspect also had an accomplice who acted as his driver.

Freilich told investigators that between 2:30 p.m. and 3 p.m. on Dec. 29, he was taking video shots of Intramuros near the Pamantasan ng Lungsod ng Maynila when the Ativan suspect approached him.

The "sweet-talking" robber introduced himself as a Citibank vice president and gave Freilich a calling card. The name "Robert Simborelli" was written on the calling card.

The suspect then offered Freilich a ride back to Manila Hotel, where the culprit said he was going to have coffee with his daughter.

Because of the robber's "flowery" way with words, Freilich agreed and they boarded the suspect's car, where the other Ativan member waited.

SPO3 Sacorum said the suspects then offered the victim a pack of pineapple juice, which was apparently laced with a sleep-inducing drug.

After he finished the drink, Freilich became dizzy and passed out, Sacorum said.

When the victim woke up, he was already in San Pedro, Laguna and his valuables were gone, Sacorum added.

Barangay officials found Freilich unconscious by the roadside in San Pedro, Sacorum said. They took the victim to a clinic and later contacted his wife in Manila.

Freilich became the second tourist to fall to the Ativan gang in Intramuros this month.

On Dec. 8, Indian tourist and businessman Yogesh Marhawa, 36, lost nearly P200,000 to an Ativan gang member who also pretended to be a CitiBank vice president.

The suspects took the Indian's P120,000 laptop, a P23,000 gold ring, a P13,000 gold necklace, clothes worth P5,000, a P4,000 Canon camera and glasses worth P3,000, Sacorum said.

They also got the victim's credit card, which could only be used in India and Nepal, and P14,000 and US$200 in cash, Sacorum added.

The suspects later left the victim unconscious in Bulacan.

Japanese on billboard is wanted in Tokyo

ON TARGET

Ramon Tulfo

YOU see his face in strategic places in Metro Manila. In Quiapo, at Edsa, at the north and south expressways, on Katipunan Road, at C-5 Road.

The face looks Japanese—round and chinky eyes—because he is. He is Genta Ogami, president of G. Cosmos Philippines. His company's name is written below the drawing of his face which occupies the whole billboard. Instead of his company, Ogami advertises his face.

It's not only in billboards that you find Ogami. He's all over the media—in the newspapers and television. He tells readers and viewers that he wants to help ordinary Filipinos earn money.

***

You wonder why a Japanese like him would want to help ordinary Filipinos when he should be helping his countrymen, instead.

Then you realize that Ogami is employing a con-man's game.

He has allegedly duped millions of gullible housewives, office workers, and retirees.

His total take: more than P1 billion pesos—repeat, billion!

***

According to reliable sources, Ogami invites his clients to invest on certain consumer products supposedly advertised on Japanese television networks. The money invested on Ogami's company supposedly depends on the response of Japanese consumers to the products in question.

The investors are supposed to get their money back, plus big profits on the first venture. Then, Ogami will invite the investors to put in their money again on another venture; but this time, he will ask for a bigger amount.

Because the investor earned on the first venture, he will invest again. And that's when the fool and his money are parted, as con-artists would say. He would tell clients that the products they invested in were not bought this time by Japanese consumers.

Actually, the money is not invested in Japan but right here in the country.

I was able to extract all these bits of information from one of Ogami's lawyers who tried to talk me out of writing this piece.

***

Here's what I learned from the lawyer: Ogami has bought into the Unitrust Bank. He is planning to put up another bank he will call the Philippine Bank of Ogami.

He also allegedly conned a thrift bank in Bulacan into lending him P170 million. He was able to get the bank's trust by depositing a huge amount. He later went to the bank to withdraw his deposit. At the same time, he asked it for a loan that he said would be used in a big business venture.

***

In August 2001, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issued an order for G. Cosmos to stop operations.

At about the same time, Adboard, a group that polices advertising agencies, has asked Ogami to tear down all his billboards. It has also asked TV and newspapers not to accept advertisements from Ogami's company.

But the billboards are still there. And so are Ogami's TV commercials and newspaper advertisements

Somebody very powerful must be backing up this Japanese character.

***

Ogami is wanted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Police for allegedly running away with investments of 5,000 of his countrymen. He reportedly put up the Graceland Limited in Japan, now bankrupt.

The money he allegedly earned from fooling his countrymen he used in attracting investors through his multimillion-peso advertising gimmick in the Philippines.

***

In order to fool more people, Ogami also tried his hand in the movies. He was to have starred with popular actress Joyce Jimenez in a movie that never was. The title of the movie would have been Blades of the Sun.

His handlers spread the rumor that he and the sex siren were having a relationship. Apparently, the rumor was meant to bolster his "star image."

The production cost of the failed movie venture was $2 million.

***

The Supreme Court should investigate Judge Eliodoro G. Ubiadas of the Olongapo Regional Trial Court for gross abuse of power.

Ubiadas has issued an injunction to the Bureau of Customs for Collector Billy Bibit to remain as chief of the Subic Bay customs office.

Ubiadas has no business issuing an injunction on purely internal matters at the customs bureau.

***

Bibit refuses to vacate his post despite repeated orders from his superiors in Manila transferring him to another customs post.

Bibit doesn't want to leave Subic Bay customs house, my sources say, because he is allegedly deep into rice and car smuggling.

Judge Ubiadas has set a bad precedent. Any government official or employee can now go to court to question his reassignment.

They also dream who live in a cart

By Christian Esguerra

SOMEONE with a bottle of Evian or Perrier in his wastebasket is most likely rich.

You can trace a bottle of Viva in another waste can to a person from the middle-income bracket.

Garbage, indeed, speaks a mouthful about a person, particularly about his social status.

Now, what if a person doesn't even have anything to dispose of?

Take the case of Julian Epondulan, 43, and his family. They are hopelessly poor that garbage has become their lone source of livelihood.

Julian, his wife Genoveva, 40, and son Michael, 12, have been scavenging all over Metro Manila since they left Zambales a couple of years after the Pinatubo eruption in 1991.

They move from city to city, pushing their ramshackle "kariton," in search for anything of value beneath piles of rubbish.

They sell plastic cups and metal scraps to junk shops.

On a lucky day, they earn around P80, Julian told the Inquirer.

"This is life for us all these years," Genoveva bared. "It's hard but it's better than to stay in the province and starve to death."

The family cart is now "stationed" on a service road off Roxas Boulevard in Pasay City where garbage has predictably piled up following the holidays.

The Epondulans got the cart a few years ago from a junk shop owner in Manila who took pity on their sorry condition.

The cart is their most prized possession, their lone space in the metropolis, their home.

In it they share their usual meals of bread, noodles, and tap water. It keeps them dry and warm on a cold, rainy evening.

On Christmas Eve, the Epondulans feasted on six buns of cheap "monay" bread and hot coffee.

This they consider one of the most meaningful Christmas celebrations they've ever had.

"It was all we could afford," Julian said. "But what's important is that my family is intact."

Julian has been reeling in poverty since he could remember. Born to farmer and a market vendor, he spent most of his childhood trying to help his parents earn a living.

Julian said he managed to get to sixth grade in a local elementary school, but had to quit for practical reasons.

He has tried it all: farming, selling native delicacies, running errands for "well-to-do" neighbors.

In 1988, Julian met Genoveva who was then vacationing in Zambales. She was from San Fernando in Pampanga.

It was love at first sight, the poor scavenger reminisced.

After a year of dating, the two got married. A year later Michael was born.

Back then, the couple thought starting a family would bring momentum and fresh hope.

They were wrong.

Together with thousands of other hapless residents, they were displaced when Mt. Pinatubo erupted in 1991.

Julian lost his job as a tricycle driver. His family starved.

A few years later he and his family left Zambales to try their luck in Manila. They were told by a cousin in Zambales that they could temporarily stay at a distant relative in Sampaloc.

"My fingers were crossed when we boarded the bus for Manila," Julian said. "I had no idea what awaited us."

Luck, if it was ever there, eluded the family in the big city.

The distant relative was nowhere to be found and the Epondulans were lost in the middle of nowhere.

The couple applied for many odd jobs, but employers refused them probably because of the way they looked, Julian said.

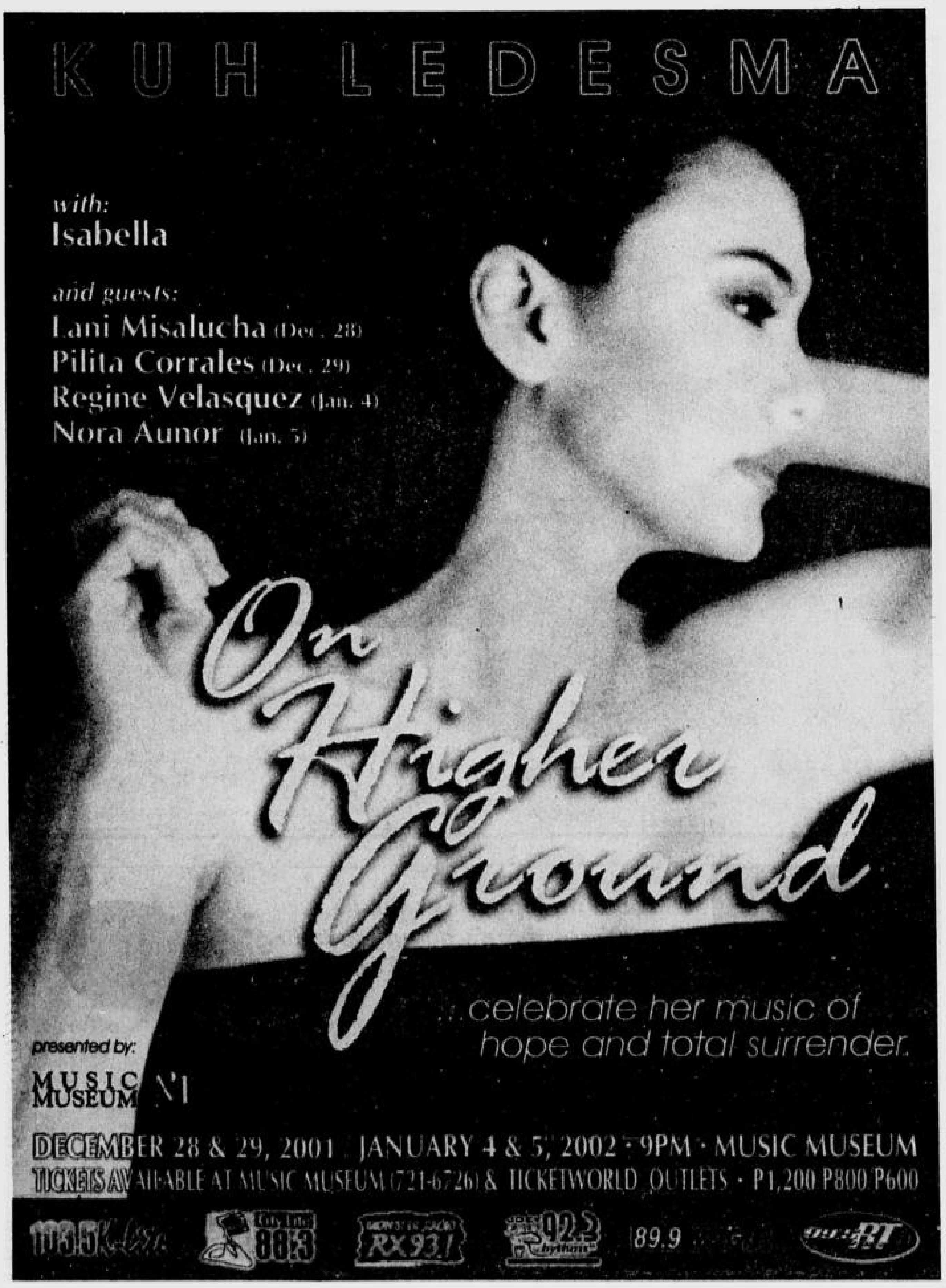
"Who would take applicants who didn't even have clean clothes?"

Soon the family roamed the streets of Sampaloc, begging or digging into piles of garbage.

On Sundays, Julian "parks" his cart in Luneta where he and his family relax while observing other families enjoy the afternoon.

As a New Year's wish, Julian dreams of sending his son to school. Of course, he knows that all he could afford now is dream.

"I couldn't even assure my family of having at least two meals a day," he said. "My main concern now is to get my family off the streets and have a cleaner and more decent livelihood."



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4 ‘kotong’ policemen sacked

By Nelson Forte Flores

EASTERN Police District Office director Senior Supt. Rolando Sacramento yesterday ordered the relief of four more policemen for extortion.

This brought to six the number of lawmen relieved from their duties this year.

Sacramento identified the four as Insp. Eduardo Villaruel, SPO2 Juancho Medalla, SPO2 Alexander Galanuc and PO3 Renaldo Francisco, all members of the EPDO's Criminal Investigation Division.

The suspects were part of a group of lawmen who robbed and demanded grease money from a Marikina City businessman early in December.

Earlier, Sacramento relieved PO3 Geminic Tingne and PO3 Taciano Dagami, both members of the EPDO's CID, because of their reported involvement in the same extortion case.

Sacramento said once investigators verified the allegations against the six policemen, he will initiate summary dismissal proceedings and criminal prosecution against the suspects.

The six policemen vehemently denied the allegations.

Sacramento said truck driver Felix Paor and his employer Alfredo Guido filed a complaint against the policemen for allegedly taking 42 sacks of flour from the victim's truck after they failed to come up with the P15,000 grease money the suspects demanded. The complainants said the flour was sold to a local flour company in Mandaluyong City.

Mishap victims pleading for help from Vic Sotto

By Agnes E. Donato

"ALL we want is for Vic Sotto to know our situation."

The three other victims in the New Year's Eve car mishap involving the comedian's son, Oyo Boy, made this call yesterday.

Vicente Sarena, 37, driver of the owner-type jeep that collided with the Toyota Rav-4 driven by the younger Sotto, said he and his two companions were not after anything but a little assistance in shouldering hospitalization and car repair.

Sarena sustained abrasions and contusions in different parts of the body when Oyo Boy's car slammed into his jeep at the intersection of Roces and Osmeña avenues inside the UP campus in Diliman, Quezon City at about 6:30 p.m. on Monday.

His companions, Adelardo Dejardo, 51, and Jesus Malate, 32, were also injured in the accident.

The three victims have not heard from the Sottos since the accident happened.

Sarena said his party had no plans of filing any charges against Oyo Boy.

"We understand that nobody wanted the accident to happen. We just hope that Mr. Vic Sotto would help us with our situation right now," he said.

He said that his only source of income was his "sideline" job as sound system operator.

Sarena's wife, Monalisa, added that her family could not even afford to buy all the medicines prescribed by the doctor for her husband's injuries.

Sarena also cited the owner-type jeepney that got wrought after it spun around twice during the accident.

"I worked hard for years just to be able to buy that vehicle," he said.

PO1 Renato Sunga of the Central Police District Traffic Management Unit said that investigation on the accident was still ongoing.

Charges of reckless imprudence resulting in damage to property with multiple physical injuries have been filed against involved parties.

Getting no corned beef, young prosti cries rape

A 19-YEAR-OLD saleslady, who works as a part-time prostitute, cried rape in Paco, Manila after her two male customers failed to remunerate her.

And what was her due?

P300 and a can of corned beef. The suspects failed to give her the canned good.

The complainant, a resident of Paco Manila who works for a fastfood outlet on Carriedo Street in Sta Cruz, said the suspects, identified as Johnny, between 24 and 35; and Jeff, 27, raped her, said investigator SPO4 Rosalyn Sy, of the Western Police District-Women's and Children Desk.

The complainant said the two men raped her between 10:30 and 11 p.m. on Tuesday somewhere in Paco.

But investigators later discovered that she agreed to have sex with the men in exchange for the P300 and the can of corned beef.

"She had been doing this for a long time and they just had a misunderstanding on Tuesday night," an investigator said.

"Her customers apparently did not make good their promise to give her the can of corned beef after they were done with her," the investigator added.

During their confrontation at the WPD headquarters, the suspects denied raping her, adding that they had paid her.

"And we are not the only ones (who were your customers)," the investigator quoted the two men telling the complainant.

All the previous customers also had to part with a can of corned beef? *Philip Tubeza* according to Associate Justice Raoul V. Victorino of the Sandiganbayan, chairman of the Golden Jubilarian

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3	BAHAY NI LOLA THX	In DSD/SDDS/DTS DIGITAL SOUND
4	TATARIN	In DTS DIGITAL SOUND
5	HUBOG	In DOLBY DIGITAL SOUND
6	HINDI KITA MA-REACH	In DTS/SDDS DIGITAL SOUND
7	BAGONG BUWAN	In DTS DIGITAL SOUND

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1	BAGONG BUWAN
2 (DTS)	BAHAY NI LOLA
3 (DOLBY)	YAMASHITA
4	TATARIN

Cinema 2000 Pavilion Mall
(Biñan) tel (049) 411.1146

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2 (DOLBY)	YAMASHITA
3 (DTS)	TATARIN
4	BAGONG BUWAN

Cinema 2000 Cinemagix
(Urdaneta) tel(075) 568.6771

1	YAMASHITA
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	SOON TO OPEN
4	SOON TO OPEN

Cinema 2000 MovieTown
(Tarlac)

1	HUBOG
2	TATARIN
3 (DOLBY)	BAHAY NI LOLA
4 (DTS)	YAMASHITA

Lianas Cinema
(Alabang) tel 850.1276

1 (SDDS)	HINDI KITA MA-REACH
2	TATARIN
3	YAMASHITA
4 (DTS)	BAGONG BUWAN

Lianas MovieCity
(Calamba) tel (049) 545.7202

1 (DOLBY)	YAMASHITA
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3 (DTS)	TATARIN
4	HARRY POTTER
5	BAGONG BUWAN

Olivarez Tri-Cinema
(Biñan) tel (049) 511.8883

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	BAGONG BUWAN
3	TATARIN

Olivarez Los Baños
tel (049) 249-2558

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	BAGONG BUWAN
3	YAMASHITA

Olivarez Tagaytay
tel (046) 413.0311

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	YAMASHITA
3	BAGONG BUWAN

Morales Cinema
(Biñan) tel (049) 511.9736

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	TATARIN
3	HINDI KITA MA-REACH

Cabuyao
(Laguna City) tel (049) 531.4808

1 (DTS)	BAHAY NI LOLA
2 (DTS)	TATARIN

Emperor
(Rosario Cavite) tel (046) 438.1657

1	HUBOG
2	HINDI KITA MA-REACH
3	BAHAY NI LOLA

Fiesta World Mall
(Lipa) tel (043) 981.0790

1	YAMASHITA
2	HUBOG
3	BAHAY NI LOLA
4	TATARIN

Jade Cinema
(Angeles City) tel (045) 887.5001 to 03

1 (DOLBY EX)	BAGONG BUWAN
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	YAMASHITA
4 (DTS ES)	TATARIN

*Movies are subject to change without prior notice

ADVANCED SCREENING THX DOLBY DIGITAL dts SDDS

THX
CMG INTERNATIONAL

PREMIERE CINEMA
THX
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LORD OF THE RINGS
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING

ROBINSONS MOVIEWORLD
State-Of-The-Art-Cinemas
NOW SHOWING
e-mail : htc@netasia-mnl.net
http://www.robinsonsmovieworld.com

GALLERIA 632-9115-16 / 633-7941 loc. 279

THX

1	YAMASHITA
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	HUBOG
5	TATARIN
6	SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7	DI KA MAREACH
8	BAGONG BUWAN
9	HUBOG
10	DI KA MAREACH

ERMITA 536-7809 TO 12

1	YAMASHITA
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	DI KA MAREACH
5	TATARIN
6	SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7	HUBOG

METRO EAST 632-9115-16 / 633-7641

1	HUBOG
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	DI KA MAREACH
4	YAMASHITA
5	TATARIN
6	BAGONG BUWAN
7	SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
8	BAHAY NI LOLA

NOVALICHES 936-3229 to 31

1	HUBOG
2	TATARIN
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	DI KA MAREACH
5	BAHAY NI LOLA
6	SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
7	YAMASHITA
8	BAGONG BUWAN

IMUS (046) 471-6169

1	DI KA MAREACH
2	SUSMARYOSEP (4 FATHERS)
3	TATARIN
4	HUBOG
5	YAMASHITA
6	BAHAY NI LOLA

BACOLOD (034) 441-0453 / 0459

1	YAMASHITA
2	HUBOG
3	BAHAY NI LOLA
4	ROCKSTAR
5	PAGDATING NG PANAHON
6	MUSKETEER

ILOILO (033) 330-8077 / 8078

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	YAMASHITA
3	HUBOG
4	BAHAY NI LOLA
5	TATARIN
6	ROCKSTAR

MOVIES ARE SUBJECT TO CHANGE WITHOUT PRIOR NOTICE

THEATER MOVIE GUIDE

ARANETA CENTER THEATERS 911-3101	
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-1	YAMASHITA
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-2	BAHAY NI LOLA
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-3 (DDS)	LORD OF THE RINGS
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-4 (SDDS)	BAGONG BUWAN
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-5 (DTS)	HUBOG
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-6 (DOLBY)	LORD OF THE RINGS
ALI MALL CINEPLEX-7 (DOLBY)	ON THE LINE
FARMERS PLAZA-1 (DOLBY)	BRO. KAHIT SAANG ENGKWENTRO
FARMERS PLAZA-2 (DOLBY)	LORD OF THE RINGS
FIESTA CARNIVAL	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
NEW FRONTIER	CLOSED FOR RENOVATION
MANILA	
EASTERN	
MAXIM	CLOSED
MIRAMAR	DALAWA SI EBA / HIYAS SA PARAISO
ODEON	BAGONG BUWAN
ODEON-2	YAMASHITA
ROBEN	HUBOG
TANDEM-1	SEX MEDUSA
TANDEM-2	SEX EDUCATION
TIMES	PUKYUTAN / STORY OF US
QUEZON CITY	
ACT-1	SENSUAL ISLAND
ACT-2	KAYA KO PERO MASAKIT
ACT-3	CLOSED
ACT-4	CLOSED
CORONET-2	ORIGINAL SIN
QUEZON-1	HUBOG
REMAR	BAGONG BUWAN
REMAR-2	YAMASHITA
NOVA MALL - NOVALICHES CINEMA	
A	YAMASHITA
B	BAHAY NI LOLA
C	HUBOG
MANDALUYONG CITY	
SHANGRI-LA PLAZA MALL	635-20-79 / 633-78-51 TO 70
CINEMA-1	HARRY POTTER
CINEMA-2	THE MUSKETEER
CAINTA RIZAL	
STA. LUCIA EAST	(681-5401 TO 19)
CINEMA-1	BAHAY NI LOLA
CINEMA-2	HUBOG
CINEMA-3	YAMASHITA
CINEMA-4 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	DI KITA MA-REACH
CINEMA-5 (DTS)	TATARIN
CINEMA-6	BAGONG BUWAN
CINEMA-7	BAGONG BUWAN
CINEMA-8	HUBOG
CINEMA-9 (DTS)	BAHAY NI LOLA
CINEMA-10 (DOLBY DIGITAL)	BAHAY NI LOLA
CINEMA-11 (SDDS)	YAMASHITA
CINEMA-12	TATARIN
CINEMA-14	BAGONG BUWAN
CINEMA-15	FOUR FATHERS
LORES	
CINEMA-2	CLOSED
CINEMA-3	CLOSED
POWER PLANT CINEMA	
CINEMA-1	HUBOG
CINEMA-2	BAHAY NI LOLA
CINEMA-3	TATARIN
CINEMA-4	YAMASHITA
CINEMA-5	BAGONG BUWAN
CINEMA-6	BAGONG BUWAN
UNIWIDE METROMALL	
(LAS PIÑAS)	
CINEMA-1	
CINEMA-2	
CINEMA-4	
UNIWIDE COASTAL MALL	
(PARAÑAQUE)	
CINEMA-1	ALIPIN NG TUKSO
CINEMA-2	THE OTHER SIDE OF LOVE
CINEMA-4	ALAMID

New 'Smooth Jazz' album

UNIVERSAL Records collaborates with FM station City Lite 88.3 to release a 14-track compilation album, "Smooth Jazz Takes," a collection of relaxing, stress-free sounds originally made popular by leading artists such as Stevie Wonder, Dionne Warwick, Burt Bacharach, Roberta Flack, Julia Fordham, Cyndi Lauper, Brian McKnight, Patti Austin, James Ingram, Joe Jackson, Swing Out Sisters, Michael Jackson, Eagles and Foreigners.

SM CINEMA
SM Dial-A-Movie Tel. 633-9999
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SM CITY BACOOR
4173868

1	TATARIN
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	YAMASHITA
4	BAGONG BUWAN
5	BAGONG BUWAN
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	4 FATHERS
8	HUBOG

SM CENTERPOINT
7149522 -7161416

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	TATARIN
3	YAMASHITA
4	HUBOG
5	BAGONG BUWAN
6	4 FATHERS
7	BAGONG BUWAN
8	DI KITA MA-REACH
9	YAMASHITA
10	BAHAY NI LOLA

SM CITY FAIRVIEW
9350749

1	YAMASHITA
2	DI KITA MA-REACH
3	TATARIN
4	BAHAY NI LOLA
5	BAGONG BUWAN
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	HUBOG
8	YAMASHITA
9	BAGONG BUWAN
10	TATARIN
11	BAGONG BUWAN
12	4 FATHERS

SM CITY MANILA
5239240

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	TATARIN
4	YAMASHITA
5	BAHAY NI LOLA
6	HUBOG
7	TATARIN
8	DI KITA MA-REACH
9	BAGONG BUWAN
10	BAHAY NI LOLA
11	4 FATHERS
12	YAMASHITA

SM MEGAMALL
6331901 • 6329401

1	TATARIN
2	4 FATHERS
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	YAMASHITA
5	DI KITA MA-REACH
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	YAMASHITA
8	BAHAY NI LOLA
9	BAGONG BUWAN
10	BAHAY NI LOLA
11	TATARIN
12	HUBOG

SM TUTUBAN
2514302

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	YAMASHITA
4	4 FATHERS

DIGITAL dts SOUND DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND•EX

SM CITY NORTH EDSA
9295452

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	HUBOG
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	YAMASHITA
5	TATARIN
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	4 FATHERS
8	BAGONG BUWAN
9	YAMASHITA
10	BAHAY NI LOLA
11	DI KITA MA-REACH
12	BAGONG BUWAN

SM SOUTHMALL
8066088 • 8066782

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	DI KITA MA-REACH
3	YAMASHITA
4	BAHAY NI LOLA
5	4 FATHERS
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	TATARIN
8	BAGONG BUWAN
9	YAMASHITA
10	HUBOG

SM GUADALUPE COMM'L
8820905

1	HUBOG
2	BAGONG BUWAN
3	YAMASHITA

SM CEBU
2313876

1	HARRY POTTER
2	MUSKETEER
3	BAHAY NI LOLA
4	BAGONG BUWAN
5	ROCKSTAR
6	HUBOG
7	TATARIN

SM ILOILO
3209422

1	HUBOG
2	CLOSED
3	HARRY POTTER
4	YAMASHITA
5	BAGONG BUWAN
6	BAHAY NI LOLA
7	CLOSED
8	TATARIN

SM PAMPANGA
7128015

1	BAGONG BUWAN
2	TATARIN
3	YAMASHITA
4	4 FATHERS
5	BAHAY NI LOLA
6	BAHAY NI LOLA

SM SUCAT
8204975

1	BAHAY NI LOLA
2	TATARIN
3	BAGONG BUWAN
4	YAMASHITA

SM DAVAO

1	YAMASHITA
2	BAHAY NI LOLA
3	HUBOG
4	BAGONG BUWAN
5	TATARIN
6	MUSKETEER

Movies are subject to change without prior notice

ENTERTAINMENT

LOUIE C. CAMINO, Editor

Before they became a star

VIEWFINDER

Nestor U. Torre

WHEN **Mel Gibson** was a kid, his father won big on "Jeopardy," and his dad used his winnings to move his family from upstate New York to Australia.

Will Smith gave up an MIT scholarship to pursue his music career.

Jennifer Aniston had one of her paintings displayed at the prestigious Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York before she entered high school.

Mickey Rourke became a professional boxer in 1991.

At age four, **Molly Shannon** survived a car crash that killed her mother, younger sister and a cousin.

Andy Garcia was born with a growth on his neck that was actually all that remained of a twin sibling!

Mel Gibson and **Judy Davis** costarred in "Romeo and Juliet" when they were drama school classmates.

Leonardo DiCaprio was kicked out of "Romper Room" at age five because he was uncontrollable.

Catherine Zeta-Jones had a tracheotomy performed in her childhood when she had a severe viral infection. A scar on her throat remains to remind her of that early ordeal.

Kevin Spacey was expelled from a military academy for hitting a fellow student with a tire during a boxing match.

Ethan Hawke was kicked out of his first class on his first day at Carnegie Mellon University.

Jim Carrey dropped out of high school at 16.

Bill Murray left his pre-med studies after being busted for pot possession at Chicago's O'Hare airport.

Brad Pitt dressed as a giant chicken as part of his job at El Pollo Loco when he first moved to Hollywood.

And **Sylvester Stallone**'s high school classmates voted him the student most likely to end up in the Electric chair!

Jackie Chan as cartoon figure

JACKIE **Chan** is now a cartoon figure. His cartoon alter ego stars in the new cartoon series, "Jackie Chan Adventures," produced by Sony Pictures Family Entertainment. For local merchandising info, call Empire Int'l. at 722-4311.

The show started airing in the States in September 2000, and became a certified hit on Kids WB. Both kids and parents like the show because, while it's action-packed, it is violence-free.

In the series, Chan is an archaeologist and martial-arts expert who travels all over the world to defeat dangerous criminals. His sidekick is his 11-year-old niece. The series will be telecast here this year by ABS-CBN.

Willie Nep's impersonations

WE'D like to commend **Willie Nepomuceno** for his on-target impersonations of national figures like **Joseph Estrada** and **Fidel Ramos.**

He has added another figure to his gallery of impersonations in the person of **Nur Misuari,** and it's one of his best ones yet. He gets everything just right—the face, the hair, the voice, the accent, the posture and gestures—wonderful!

It must take a lot of observation and practice on his part, but the "finished product" is well worth all that time and effort. We have other good impersonators, but some of them tend to be sloppy when it comes to details.

This is unfortunate, because it's really in the details that the nuances of character and temperament emerge. Willie Nep knows this, hence his extreme care when it comes to costuming, wig, make-up, prosthetics, etc.

Younger impersonators should study his process with great interest. Many of them fall short of the mark because they're too impatient and take shortcuts. Willie Nep takes his time, so his impersonations set the standards—and are here to stay.

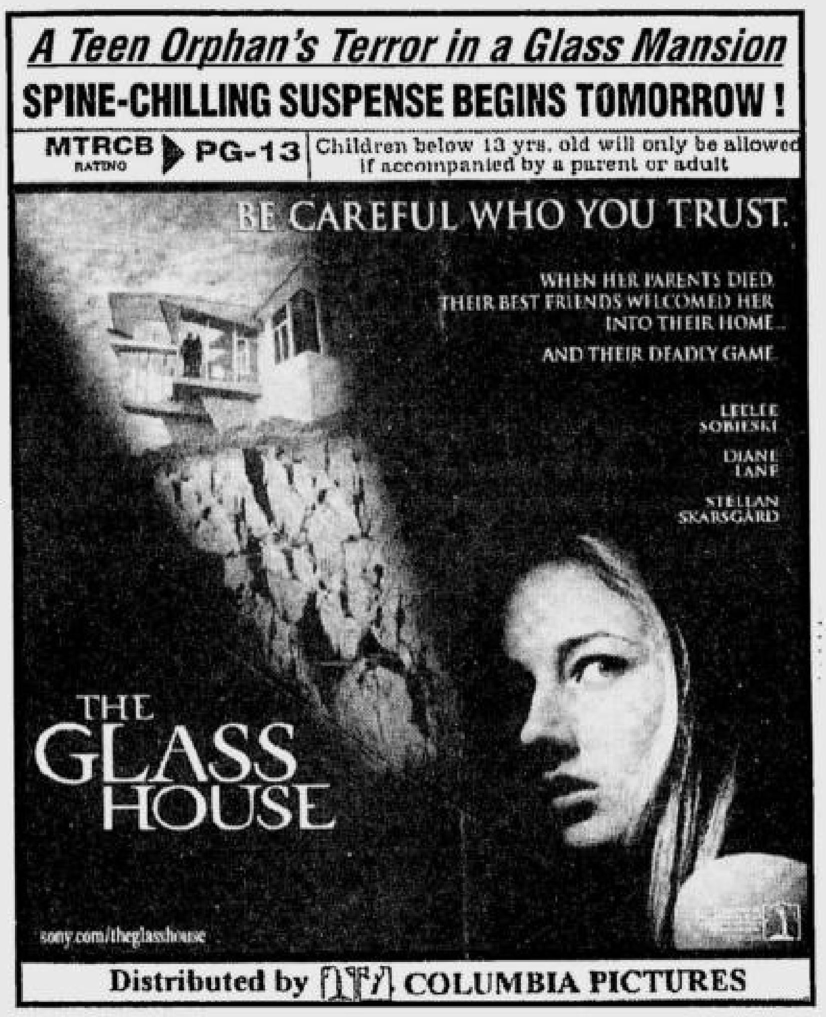
THE CONCERT QUEEN IS BACK
Arianworks Management Corporation, Manila's newest events management team, with Viva Mineral Water, presents "Weekends with Pops," a concert series on all Fridays and Saturdays of January at Onstage in Greenbelt. The show is directed by Floy Quintos, with musical direction by Homer Flores. RJ Rosales of "Asap," as well as surprise celebrity guests will join Pops every weekend. Tickets are available at National Bookstore, Robinson's Department Store, Tower Records, Music Museum and Ticket World outlets or call 891-5610 and Arianworks at 723-6049.

ArianWorks Management Corporation in association with VIVA! proudly present
Weekends with Pops
Onstage GREENBELT MALL
January 4, 5, 11, 12, 18, 19, 25 & 26 at 9:00 PM
Musical Director: Homer Flores
Stage Director: Floy Quintos
Ticket Prices: P600 P900 P1200
Tickets are available at NATIONAL BOOKSTORE, ROBINSON'S DEPARTMENT STORES, TOWER RECORDS and at the MUSIC MUSEUM
www.ticketworld.com.ph or call 891-5610
in cooperation with the official energy drink RedBull AGFA the official film Cheese Athena
also brought to you by Baby Bath Lactacyd havee Volvo
the official concert residence THE PENINSULA
the official concert outfitter
http://www.arianworks.com/weekendswithpops

POWER PLANT CINEMA
Rockwell Center, Makati City ☎ Tel. No: 8981440-41 DOLBY DIGITAL SURROUND-EX

HUBOG - R 18 11:00, 1:10, 3:20, 5:30, 7:40, 9:50	BAHAY NI LOLA - GP 12:00, 2:00, 4:00, 6:00, 8:00	TATARIN - R 18 11:00, 1:10, 3:25, 5:40, 7:55, 10:10
YAMASHITA - GP 12:25, 2:45, 5:05, 7:25, 9:45	BAGONG BUWAN - P 13 1:00, 3:40, 6:20, 9:00	BAGONG BUWAN - P 13 11:20, 2:00, 4:40, 7:20, 10:00

Matinee, P80, Mon.-Fri., 11:00 am to 4:45 pm Screenings, Free Seating.



A Teen Orphan's Terror in a Glass Mansion
SPINE-CHILLING SUSPENSE BEGINS TOMORROW !
MTRCB RATING PG-13 Children below 13 yrs. old will only be allowed if accompanied by a parent or adult
BE CAREFUL WHO YOU TRUST.
WHEN HER PARENTS DIED, THEIR BEST FRIENDS WELCOMED HER INTO THEIR HOME... AND THEIR DEADLY GAME.
LEELEE SOBIESKI DIANE LANE STELLAN SKARSGARD
THE GLASS HOUSE
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THE LORD OF THE RINGS
THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING
MTRCB Rating: General Patronage
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THX

The search begins TOMORROW
She was one in a million.
His chances of finding her again are a million to one.
N*SYNC's LANCE BASS & JOEY FATONE
ON THE LINE
Featuring new music by *NSYNC, BRITNEY SPEARS, JESSICA FOLKER, VITAMIN C and many more!
On The Line original motion picture soundtrack now available under
MYX MIRAMAX SKYFILMS
MTRCB RATING G General Patronage | ALL AGES ADMITTED.

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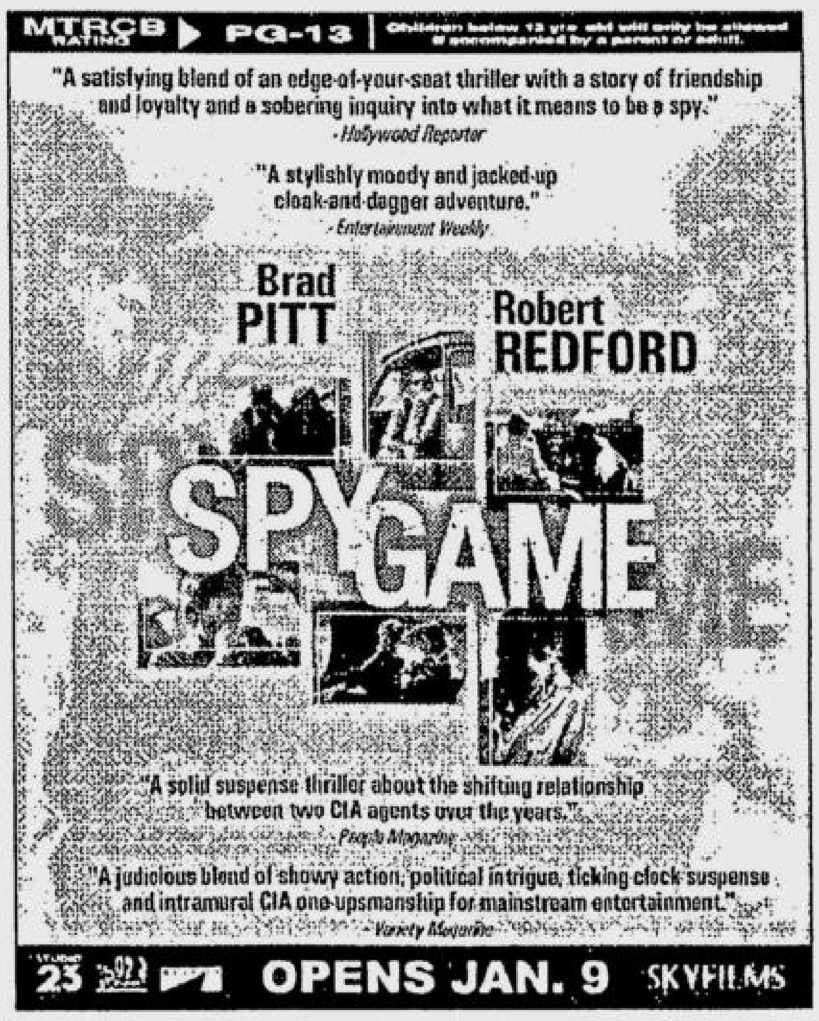

MTRCB RATING PG-13 Children below 13 yrs. old will only be allowed if accompanied by a parent or adult.
"A satisfying blend of an edge-of-your-seat thriller with a story of friendship and loyalty and a sobering inquiry into what it means to be a spy." - Hollywood Reporter
"A stylishly moody and jacked-up cloak-and-dagger adventure." - Entertainment Weekly
Brad PITT Robert REDFORD
SPY GAME
"A solid suspense thriller about the shifting relationship between two CIA agents over the years." - People Magazine
"A judicious blend of showy action, political intrigue, ticking clock suspense and intramural CIA one-upsmanship for mainstream entertainment." - Variety Magazine
23 OPENS JAN. 9 SKYFILMS
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BUSINESS

RAUL O. MARCELO, Editor ■ CORRIE S. NARISMA, Assistant Editor

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ADB readies $349M in loans for RP

THE ASIAN Development Bank has put in place $349 million worth of financing and technical assistance for the Philippines for 2002 to cover priority projects in the areas of forestry, education, utility and infrastructure.

Data furnished by ADB country director for the Philippines Gunther Hecker said the package consisted of loans for six development projects and two technical assistance grants.

Hecker also said the bank was expecting better disbursement of funds this year by the Philippines given government efforts to improve the country's absorption of official development assistance.

"Counterpart funding should not be a problem," Hecker added.

The ADB, for its part, created last year a country unit for the Philippines to focus on ADB-funded development projects in the country.

The biggest in the list of projects to be funded by the ADB this year is the $210-million Education Sector Development Program. Of the project's total cost, the ADB will finance $75 million. The balance will be covered by non-government co-financing.

Sharing the lead is the $187.5-million Rural Roads Development Project which will be partly funded by ADB with a $75-million loan.

The other projects to be funded by the ADB this year and the respective amount of funding assistance from the institution are as follow:

- Mindanao Basic Education Development ($50 million);
- Development of Poor Urban Communities Project ($50 million);
- Power Trading and Pooling System ($50 million), and;
- Enhancement of Rural Livelihood in Mindanao Forestlands or the Mindanao Community-based Forest Resource Management ($40 million).

The technical assistance from the ADB for the year were earmarked for Metropolitan Waterworks and Sewerage System's new water source development project ($4 million) and the Philippine National Railways' restructuring program ($5 million).

These projects form part of an agreement earlier forged by the Philippines with the ADB to alleviate poverty.

The ADB provides up to $400 million in loans and grants to the Philippines yearly.

The ADB's loans to the country were aimed at helping ensure macroeconomic stability and equitable growth based on free enterprise; agriculture modernization with social equity; comprehensive human development and protection of the vulnerable sectors, and good governance.

The bank has also pledged to give special attention to war-torn Mindanao in support of the government's efforts to ensure sustained peace and development in the area.

The Philippines has so far availed itself of around $8 billion in total loans and grants from the ADB to finance key development projects since the bank started operating in 1966.

Merill Lynch, Goldman Sachs eye banks' NPLs

TWO more foreign groups—Merill Lynch and Goldman Sachs—are planning to invest in the Philippines by absorbing and selling some of the bad loans of the country's operating banks now worth P282 billion.

Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura said he was informed of the plan of the two investment banks but admitted that he has yet to talk to them directly.

"If these were true, we welcome this development. Both groups are active in the asset management business," said the central bank chief.

Merill Lynch and Goldman Sachs will join two other groups that have committed to put up asset management and disposition business in the country.

Lehman Bros. earlier said it would allot as much as $1 billion to buy some of the Philippine banks' non-performing loans. Cerberus Inc. forged a memorandum of understanding with the government for a $1.5-billion recovery package.

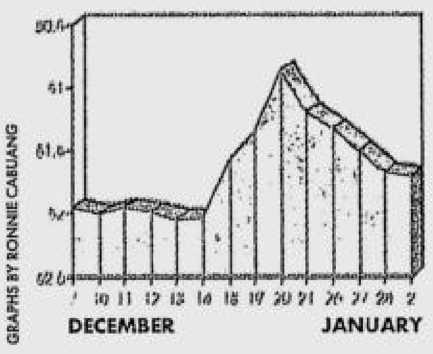
Once a law that will provide incentives to asset management companies is passed, the government expects more foreign groups to get into this business, said the central bank chief.

MERILL/ B2

INDICATORS

CURRENCIES

PESO - DOLLAR



Peso-Dollar Rate

₱ 51.70 = $1

As of 5 p.m.,
Jan. 2, 2002

¥ 131.46 = $1

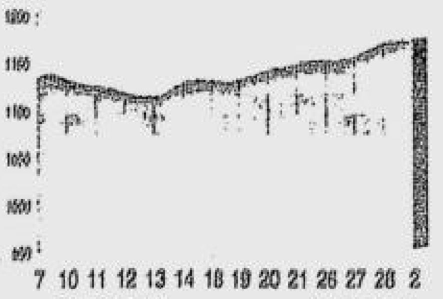
As of 5 p.m.,
Dec. 28, 2001

GOLD:$277.60/278.10

per ounce Hong Kong,
Jan. 2, 2002

STOCK MARKET

PSE Composite Index



(See stock market report on Page B2)

Shares up

THE STOCK market closed marginally higher in light trade yesterday, the first trading day of 2002, with property and retail firms taking the lead because of low interest rates.

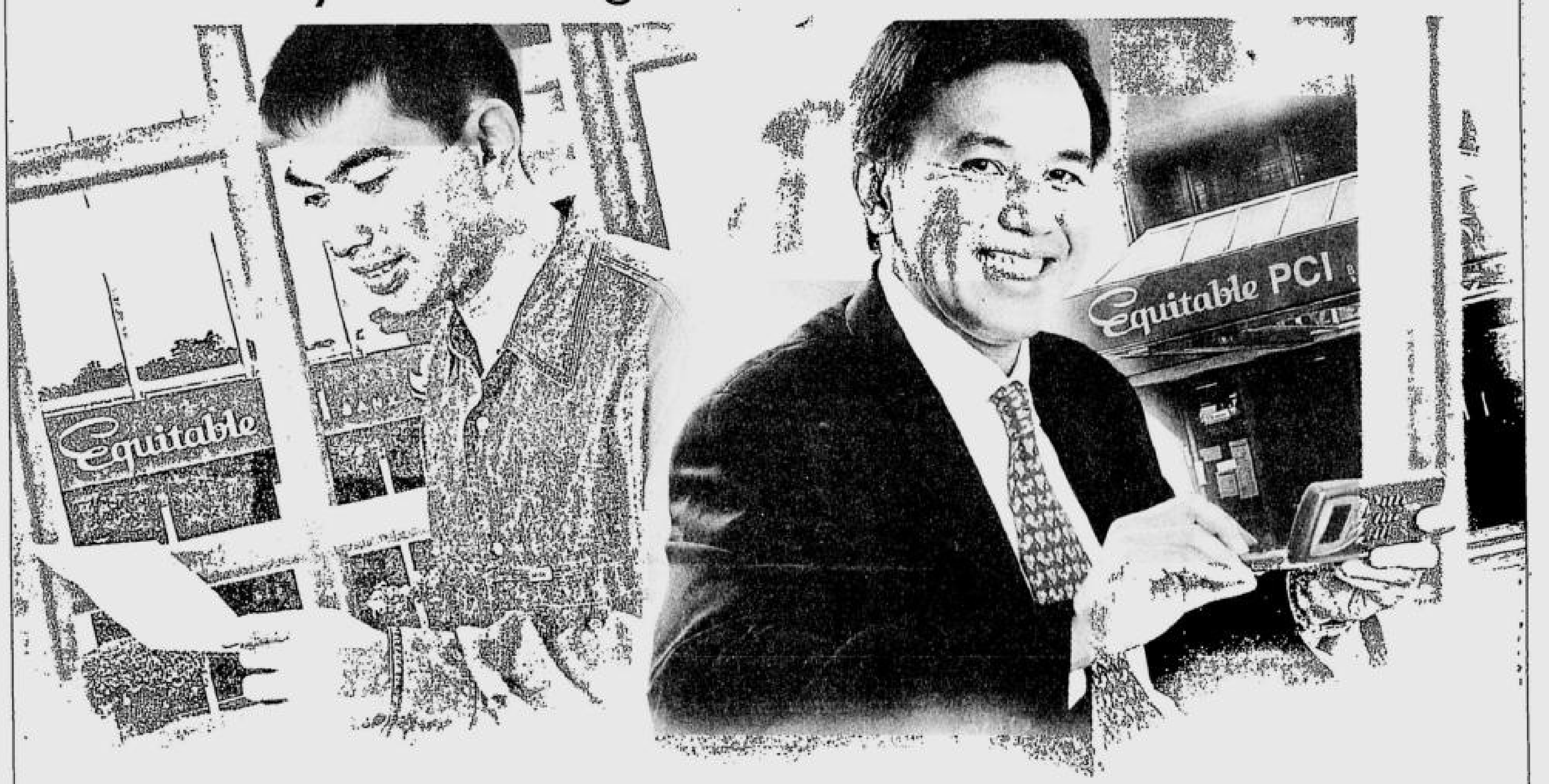
Traders and a fund manager said they expected the market to remain slow for the rest of the week, with investors awaiting more economic indicators like the annual December inflation figures before taking positions.

The 33-share composite index ended 1.49 points higher, or 0.13 percent, at 1,169.57. Turnover fell to P234.67 million from the previous P1.331 billion.

Gainers outpaced losers 29 to 22, while the prices of 25 issues were unchanged. The main index had fallen 21.8 percent last year. *Reuters*

Equitable PCI BANK

"My bank is right where I want it to be."



"Right where I am." Equitable PCI Bank looks after my best interest. It even moved closer to me. To see to my needs, hear out my wants, know my dreams, and of course, care for me and my funds better. Discover for yourself how your bank ought to be, right behind you. Look for the new Equitable PCI Bank branch nearest you.

NEW LOCATIONS

Mandalagan - Lacson G/F, Sta. Clara Estate, Inc. Bldg., Lacson St., Mandalagan, Bacolod City
Cordillera - Quezon Avenue Quezon Avenue corner Cordillera St., Quezon City
Bangued - Abra Unit 12, Rosario Bldg., Taft St. cor. Magallanes St., Bangued, Abra
Domestic Road - Pasay Caltex Compound, (PDSC/Park 'N Fly Bldg.) NAIA corner Domestic Roads, Pasay City
Rockwell Center - Makati Rockwell Drive cor. R. Palma St., Rockwell Center, Poblacion, Makati City
Tomas Morato - Kamuning Corner Kamuning & Tomas Morato Avenue, Quezon City
Fernandez - Dagupan City A.B. Fernandez Ave., 2400 Dagupan City, Pangasinan
Caceres - Naga E. Angeles cor. Caceres Sts., 4400 Naga City, Camarines Sur
Rizal St. - San Pablo Rizal Avenue cor. P. Alcantara St., San Pablo City, Laguna
Kamias Road San Sebastian Bldg., No. 90 Kamias Road cor. K-J St., Quezon City
Digos - Gen. Luna Rizal Avenue, Zone II, Digos, Davao del Sur
Blue Ridge - Katipunan Upper Ground Floor Level, Marmico Bldg., 223 Katipunan Road, Brgy. Milagrosa, Quezon City
Big R - Robinson's Novaliches Level 1, Big R Lobby, Robinson's Place - Novaliches, Quirino Highway, Novaliches, Quezon City

EXPANDED BRANCHES

Ortigas I - Exchange Road G/F, PSE East Tower, Exchange Road, Ortigas Center, Pasig City
J.P. Rizal - Baliwag J.P. Rizal St., San Jose, Baliwag, Bulacan
Bonifacio St. - Tuguegarao Bonifacio St., Tuguegarao, Cagayan
Forest Hills - Novaliches Lot 2, D 1, Quirino Avenue, Novaliches, Quezon City
Robinson's Galleria - Ortigas Robinson's Galleria, Ortigas Avenue, Quezon City
New York - EDSA EDSA corner New York St., Cubao, Quezon City
Iznart - Iloilo Iznart St., 5000 Iloilo City, Iloilo

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Jaka II - Legaspi St. G/F, Jaka II Bldg., 150 Legaspi St., Legaspi Village, Makati City
DPC Place - Chino Roces Ave. G/F, DPC Place, 2322 Chino Roces Avenue, Makati City
Times Plaza - U.N. Avenue Unit G - 2B, Times Plaza Bldg., Taft cor. United Nations Avenue, Ermita, Manila
Sales St., Raon 545 Sales St., near corner G. Puyat St., (Raon), Sta. Cruz, Manila
Downtown - Roxas City Roxas Avenue, Roxas City, Capiz

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Moody's to retain negative outlook, dashes gov't hopes

By Clarissa S. Batino

UNCONVINCED that the Macapagal administration can sustain growth and maintain fiscal discipline against the backdrop of a global economic slump, US-based ratings agency Moody's Investors Service is retaining its negative outlook for the Philippines.

"The negative outlook would be retained for the medium term, and that would be 18 to 24 months down the road," Finance Secretary Jose Isidro Camacho announced in a news briefing yesterday.

The government has been hoping to get from Moody's a stable outlook from its current negative rating. The ratings agency has dashed such a hope.

Camacho pointed out, however, that Moody's would no longer downgrade its Philippine sovereign rating as it earlier planned.

Moody's was earlier set to downgrade the country's sovereign rating of "Ba1," a level a notch lower than investment grade.

"I believe Moody's recognizes the achievements we have made, but because of the weak global environment, they wanted to see whether we could sustain our gains," Camacho told reporters.

The finance secretary and Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas Governor Rafael Buenaventura had expected Moody's to upgrade its Philippine outlook to stable following key reforms that Congress approved last year. These included a law privatizing the local energy sector and an anti-money laundering law.

Camacho and Buenaventura were also hoping that the government's fiscal strategy, which helped it keep its budget deficit at P145 billion for the first time in four years, would have an impact on Moody's.

In April, Moody's snubbed the efforts of the Macapagal administration to put in place reforms and cited a "reemergence" of political uncertainties as a factor in retaining its negative outlook for the Philippines, a verdict it first handed out in November the previous year.

Another credit rating firm, Standard & Poor's, also maintained a negative outlook for the Philippines in March, a follow up to its October 2000 decision.

Standard & Poor's is expected to hold its review of the Philippine economy in the first quarter, but a Moody's decision, according to analysts, may influence Standard & Poor's verdict.

An upgrade in its sovereign outlook improves the country's chances of a positive adjustment in its credit rating.

The Philippine government has been wanting to secure a rating upgrade from Moody's and Standard & Poor's, whose current "Ba1" and "BB+" ratings are both below investment grade.

Camacho expressed optimism that the decision of Moody's to retain a negative outlook would not have a significant impact on the cost of the government's borrowing since spreads on the country's credit had declined significantly since Sept. 11.

"Our credit spread had declined by about 250 basis points since the time it peaked following the Sept. 11 tragedies. We are already achieving now what we intend to achieve if we will have a better rating," he said.

Camacho said he believed Moody's considered the strengths that the Macapagal administration had demonstrated.

"They came here thinking that there is a need to downgrade the rating itself. I believe they viewed our achievements positively. They recognized that the government had done a lot, but it was only for 11 months so they wanted to see the sustainability of our direction," he said.

He said Moody's concerns focused on how the Philippines would be affected by the weakness of the global economies.

CAMACHO

Moody's and Standard & Poor's have expressed concerns that the country may have a harder time accessing foreign credit given a huge domestic debt and a strong dependence on exports.

Standard & Poor's was the first to downgrade its outlook to negative in October 2000 following an illegal numbers scandal involving then President Joseph Estrada.

Guoco sets expansion of Tutuban retail hub

By Doris C. Dumlao

THE GUOCO group is planning to expand its 8-hectare retail hub in Tutuban, Manila, to take advantage of the robust retail business in the Philippines.

In a news conference, Prime Orion Philippines Inc. executive vice president Yuen Po Seng said the group was negotiating with a local property developer to participate in the development of an idle 1.5-hectare lot in Tutuban, widely regarded as the country's bargaining capital.

He declined to name the other party involved.

"It will be a mixed-use development or a commercial center. We can also put up a small hotel," Seng told reporters. "Right now, we're in the development stage."

He said since Guoco had air rights to the property, it had the option to pursue new vertical or high-rise development.

Seng said the amount of investments that Guoco would pour into the new project would depend on the master plan that its partner would draw up.

Tutuban Properties Inc., one of the Guoco group's core companies, is handling the development of the Tutuban retail center.

"The primary operational focus (for TPI) for the past fiscal year—and a key contributing factor to the company's positive results—was revenue and operational enhancement programs for the Tutuban center," a recent company report said.

"These programs were continuously undertaken to maintain the center's strong brand equity as the leading bargain-trading district in the metropolis and sustain its operations as a steady source of income for the group," it said.

Among the revenue-enhancement initiatives undertaken by Guoco were programs to increase traffic density, retention of quality tenants through various incentives schemes and development of non-traditional sources of income, such as a night market, parking, advertisement spaces, stalls and exhibits.

These initiatives lifted Tutuban Properties' gross revenue by 8 percent during its last fiscal year ending June despite sluggish consumer spending arising from a difficult economic environment.

Tutuban Properties has also entered into an agreement with 22ban.com, a value-shopping portal, to anchor its website by showcasing online all its merchants and products as well as featured events and promotions.

Prime Orion is engaged in manufacturing and distribution, real estate and financial services business. Its three other core subsidiaries apart from Tutuban Properties, are Lepanto Ceramics Inc., Pepsi Cola Products Philippines Inc. and Cyber Bay Corp.

Eastern delays depot expansion

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE CLOSURE of new oil firm Eastern Petroleum Corp.'s depot in Pasig is expected to delay its plans of doubling the storage capacity of the facility.

Eastern Petroleum chair Fernando Martinez said in an interview yesterday that the planned P50-million investment would be delayed because Eastern Petroleum had yet to discuss the plan with the Pasig city government, and it would have to re-evaluate it.

"We had planned to double the depot's maximum storage capacity to 2 million liters by 2003," Martinez told the INQUIRER.

He said the depot's expansion was key to Eastern Petroleum's plan to operate 200 service stations by 2005.

"But this does not mean we won't continue with the new stations," Martinez clarified. "It's just that it is better if we have our own terminal."

The new oil firm's depot, where an average of between 300,000 and 400,000 liters of petroleum products pass through daily, was ordered closed last Dec. 11 on petitions of residents living near it.

"They complained about the supposed foul smell in the area, but we have all the necessary permits and the documents to prove (that we comply with all safety requirements)," Martinez said.

Eastern Petroleum's chief stressed that the company's depot was one of the country's most modern oil terminals in terms of safety standards.

He said all the papers that the Pasig city government sought had been submitted and that Eastern Petroleum was now awaiting a decision to allow the depot's reopening.

"We expect to be allowed to operate again within the week," Martinez said.

Also, he maintained that the depot's closure caused a supply shortage that affected about 50 gasoline stations in Metro Manila and the provinces.

"For our part, we are suffering added costs in terminal fees and handling fees for each day that our depot remains closed," Martinez said.

Food service outlook to remain sluggish as economic slump bites

THE OUTLOOK for the food service sector will remain sluggish during the first quarter this year as local industries continue to adjust to the fallout from international economic distortions late last year, a food industry official said yesterday.

According to Maritess Concepcion, president of CSP International Commodities Corp., a recovery in the food sector will be slow and gradual although the outlook is not as bleak as earlier anticipated. Concepcion noted that last year, most food service companies experienced drop in sales of as high as 30 percent. The food service sector generally refers to food chain and restaurant operations, which is a key component of the food industry.

"If no significant improvement in the economy is felt during the first half, a lot of food service operators will be forced to close shop this year," she warned. She added that already, hundreds of workers in the hotel and restaurant trade were laid off last year.

Concepcion attributed the poor performance of the food service sector last year mainly to reduced consumer spending and continued depreciation of the peso against the US dollar. She noted that while there may have been a perceptible increase in the number of persons going to casual and fast-food outlets last year, particularly during the holiday season, per capita spending actually dropped significantly. A combination of reduced consumer spending and higher foreign exchange costs will be fatal to the sector, she added.

According to Concepcion, outlets and suppliers will need to cut margins to make operations sustainable in the long term. She also said that CSP International, which she heads, would work out better deals for its customers to make them cope with the situation.

CSP International is a major food trading company that supplies vital items to hotels, food chains and food processors. Among its newest products is the Pacific salmon, which was shipped from Canada a few weeks ago.

Canadian Embassy officials in Manila cited CSP for introducing Canadian Pacific salmon in commercial quantities.

Mabuhay sees ₱150-M income

By Abigail L. Ho

MABUHAY Philippines Satellite Corp. has said its net income this year will hit P150 million, P10 million higher than its 2001 projections.

"As the year 2002 is projected to remain flat for the local economy and as the local telecom and broadcast industries are projected to be in a state of consolidation and restructuring, Mabuhay Satellite is looking toward the international market and the provision of value-added services in order to maintain revenue stream and growth for 2002," Mabuhay president Gabriel Pimentel said.

The company already has a large number of customers in the country, but some are undergoing debt restructuring and consolidation processes, so there is a certain amount of risk involved in collecting from these firms.

Cash-strapped Bayan Telecommunications Inc. and Capitol Wireless Inc. are both Mabuhay's customers.

"We hope nothing untoward happens to them as this will have an impact on our business. We have to offset and anticipate some business losses from companies that may not be able to pay up," he said.

Pimentel expressed confidence that Mabuhay would maintain profitability with its plan to expand abroad.

Abigail L. Ho

Merill Lynch, Goldman . . .

(From page B1)

Buenaventura said Lehman had informed him of its investment plan that would help the local banking system unload its non-performing loans, whose ratio to the sector's total loan portfolio has reached 18.81 percent as of October.

NPLs are loans whose interests and principals have not been paid for three consecutive months. The increasing level of banks' bad loans reflect the inability of individuals and corporate borrowers to service their loans.

Buenaventura said the 18 percent NPL ratio could be considered unacceptable. "That is why we are pushing for the creation of AMCs and also for banks to increase their capital and lend aggressively," he said.

Lehman Bros. is reportedly in talks with the Metrobank Group and Equitable PCI regarding ways to address the bad loans problems of the two local banks through joint AMC ventures.

Buenaventura said the investment of Lehman would come in once the law that would provide incentives to AMCs or special purpose asset vehicles was passed.

A pending bill in Congress exempts AMCs from the 6 percent capital gains tax on the transfer of property. It also allows foreign groups to lease real estate property for a long period.

These incentives were meant to attract foreign investors to get into the business of absorbing and selling NPLs. Buenaventura said the government might ask Congress to also extend incentives to direct buyers of these assets.

US firm Cerberus earlier signed two separate memoranda of understanding with the Philippine government worth $1.5 billion during the state visit of President Macapagal-Arroyo to the United States.

Cerberus Ltd. is said to be the second largest corporate restructuring firm in the US with $7 billion worth of funds in its portfolio.

The plan is to put up a $500-million Philippine business recovery fund that will be used to facilitate the restructuring of distressed local companies.

As of October, the bad loans of the country's 44 commercial banks swelled to P291.38 billion from month-ago level of P281.826 billion while total loans declined to P1.549 trillion from P1.572 trillion.

DISCLOSURES

CENTRAL Azucarera Don Pedro has bought 300,000 of its own shares at 80 centavos each.

* * *

EURO-MED Laboratories Philippines Inc. has declared a 15-percent stock dividend from its unrestricted retained earnings as of Nov. 30, 2001.

* * *

BENGUET Corp. has announced that it has not elected a new set of directors because of the Supreme Court's 1993 temporary restraining order. The company's present directors will remain in office until their successors are elected. Representing class A shares of stock are Dennis Belmonte, Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, Maria Remedios Pompidou, Antonio Tanchuling, Luis Juan Virata and Carlos Valdes. Representing class B shares are Benjamin Philip Romualdez, Venicio Escolin, Andres Gatmaitan and Bernardo Villegas.

* * *

DIGITAL Telecommunications Philippines Inc. said it did not owe **Benpres Corp.** and was not the source and owner of the 795.05-million Digitel shares that Benpres recently bought. ***Compiled by Maricar D. Tolosa, PDI Research***

Philippine Stock Exchange

(As of Wednesday, January 02, 2002)

STOCKS	OPEN	HIGH	LOW	CLOSE	VOLUME
BANKS & FINANCIAL SERVICES					
BANKS					
Asiatrust Dev. Bank Inc.	4.5	4.5	4.5	4.5	1,000
Bank of the Phil. Islands	57.5	58	57.5	58	230,500
Chinatrust Comm. Bank	17	17	17	17	2,000
Equitable PCI Bank Inc.	24.5	24.5	24.5	24.5	269,800
Metropolitan Bank & Trust	194	200	192	200	43,500
Philippine National Bank	67	67	66	66	16,000
Security Bank Corp.	17	17.25	16.75	17.25	95,100
Union Bank of the Phil.	15.5	15.5	15.5	15.5	8,000
FINANCIAL SERVICE					
Filipino Fund Inc.	0.32	0.32	0.31	0.31	180,000
Manulife Financial Corp.	1300	1300	1300	1300	3,490
Sun Life Financial Serv.	1100	1100	1080	1080	8,850
COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL					
COMMUNICATION					
Digital Telecom Phils. Inc.	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	620,000
Globe Telecom Inc.	670	680	670	680	10,700
Ipeople Inc.	0.79	0.8	0.79	0.8	400,000
Manila Bulletin Pub. Corp.	3.2	3.5	3.2	3.5	20,000
Phil. Long Dis Tel Co.	417.5	417.5	417.5	417.5	38,850
Philweb.Com Inc.	0.016	0.016	0.017	0.016	28,600,000
POWER & ENERGY					
Manila Electric Co. B	30	30.5	30	30	683,800
Petron Corp.	1.44	1.5	1.44	1.48	3,016,000
TRANSPORTATION SERVICES					
Int'l Container Term'l Sv	2.06	2.2	2.06	2.2	2,431,000
William, Gothong & Aboitiz	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	2,000
CONSTRUCTION & OTHER RELATED PRODUCTS					
Fortune Cement Corp.	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	90,000
Republic Glass Hldg. Corp.	1.32	1.36	1.32	1.36	80,000
FOOD, BEVERAGES & TOBACCO					
Cosmos Bottling Corp.	5.8	5.8	5.8	5.8	208,000
Jollibee Foods Corp.	12.25	12.25	12.25	12.25	268,200
La Tondeña Distillers Inc.	23.5	23.5	23.5	23.5	8,000
RFM Corp.	2.3	2.36	2.3	2.32	739,000
San Miguel Corp. A	42.5	43	42.5	42.5	86,800
San Miguel Corp. B	53	54	53	54	181,900
HOLDING FIRMS					
Abacus Con Res & Hdg A	0.66	0.66	0.61	0.61	50,000
Abacus Con Res & Hdg B	0.66	0.66	0.65	0.65	20,000
Ayala Corp.	4.7	4.7	4.65	4.7	3,149,000
Aboitiz Equity Ventures	1.56	1.56	1.56	1.56	39,000
Ajo.Net Holdings Inc.	0.77	0.78	0.77	0.78	200,000
A. Soriano Corp.	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51	150,000
Alcorn Gold Res. Corp.	0.0065	0.0065	0.0065	0.0065	47,000,000
Benpres Holdings Corp.	0.6	0.63	0.6	0.62	1,550,000
A Brown Company Inc.	0.5	0.5	0.46	0.46	120,000
DMCI Holdings Inc.	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.17	300,000
First Phil Hldgs Corp.	25.5	25.5	25.5	25.5	66,700
Global Equities Inc.	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09	100,000
Guoco Holdings (Phils.)	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.14	10,000
House of Investments Inc.	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	200,000
Megaworld Corp.	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7	450,000
Metro Pacific Corp.	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	13,500,000
Music Corp.	0.35	0.35	0.34	0.34	290,000
Roxas Holdings Inc.	0.8	0.8	0.8	0.8	50,000
Uniwide Holdings Inc.	0.18	0.18	0.18	0.18	300,000
Wellex Industries Inc.	0.32	0.36	0.32	0.36	60,000
Waterfront Phils. Inc.	0.3	0.3	0.28	0.3	360,000
MANUFACTURING, DISTRIBUTION & TRADING					
Federal Chemicals Inc.	7	7	7	7	5,000
Metro Alliance Holdings	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	10,000
SPI Technologies Inc.	14	14.25	14	14.25	36,000
HOTEL, RECREATION & OTHER SERVICE					
Belle Corp.	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.55	780,000
Grand Plaza Hotel Corp.	16	16	15.5	15.5	5,500
BONDS, PREFERRED & WARRANTS					
ABS-CBN Hldgs. Corp. (Pdr)	24	24	24	24	1,122,900
Equitable PCI Bank-War	1.72	1.72	1.72	1.72	12,000
Globe Tel. A - Warrants	480	480	480	480	10
Globe Telecom Hldg. (Pdr)	670	670	670	670	250
Philweb.Com Inc.-Warrants	0.005	0.005	0.005	0.005	2,000,000
PROPERTY					
Ayala Land Inc.	4.8	4.9	4.8	4.9	6,498,000
Araneta Properties Inc.	0.12	0.12	0.12	0.12	200,000
C & P Homes Inc.	0.215	0.215	0.215	0.215	310,000
Cyber Bay Corp.	0.31	0.32	0.31	0.32	720,000
Filinvest Land Inc.	1.66	1.7	1.66	1.68	746,000
Kuok Phil. Properties	0.13	0.13	0.13	0.13	90,000
MRC Allied Ind. Inc.	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.23	50,000
Philippine Estates Corp.	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.05	2,000,000
SM Prime Holdings Inc.	6.3	6.4	6.3	6.4	4,580,000
MINING					
Itogon-Suyoc Mines A	0.021	0.021	0.021	0.021	2,000,000
Manila Mining Corp. A	0.0036	0.0036	0.0036	0.0036	1,000,000
Omico Corp.	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	0.0032	10,000,000
Polar Mines & Dev't Corp.	0.015	0.015	0.015	0.015	15,000,000
OIL					
Oriental Pet. & Min. A	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	20,000,000
Oriental Pet. & Min. B	0.006	0.006	0.006	0.006	9,000,000
The Philodrill Corp. A	0.25	0.25	0.24	0.24	40,000

	SHARES	VALUE(P)
Banks & Fin Svc	858,240	45,426,075.00
Comm'l & Ind'l	109,522,110	128,020,775.00
PRO	15,194,000	62,563,850.00
Mining	28,000,000	302,600.00
OIL	29,040,000	183,900.00
GRAND TOTALS:	182,614,350	236,497,200.00

	AVERAGES	
Banks & Fin Svc	501.80	DOWN 3.22
Comm'l & Ind'l	1,582.05	UP 2.66
PRO	507.14	UP 5.84
Mining	1,007.51	DOWN 3.78
OIL	1.98	UP 0.05
All Shares Index	695.22	UP 12.35
Composite	1,169.57	UP 1.49

NO. OF ADVANCES: 29; NO. OF DECLINES: 22; NO. OF UNCHANGED: 25; NO. OF TRADED ISSUES: 76; NO. OF TRADES: 1,074

CURRENCIES

Jan. 02, 2002

Country	Unit	Euro Equivalent	Foreign currency in US$	Foreign currency in Peso
United States	Dollar	1.124101	1.000000	51.6900
Japan	Yen	0.008544	0.007601	0.3929
United Kingdom	Pound	1.634330	1.453900	75.1521
Hong Kong	Dollar	0.144301	0.128370	6.6354
Switzerland	Franc	0.676151	0.601504	31.0917
Canada	Dollar	0.706049	0.628101	32.4665
Singapore	Dollar	0.608609	0.541419	27.9859
Australia	Dollar	0.574988	0.511509	26.4399
Bahrain	Dinar	2.981858	2.652661	137.1160
Kuwait	Dinar	N/A	N/A	N/A
Saudi Arabia	Rial	0.299761	0.266667	13.7840
Brunei	Dollar	0.604843	0.538068	27.8127
Indonesia	Rupiah	0.000109	0.000097	0.0050
Thailand	Baht	0.025426	0.022619	1.1692
UAE	Dirham	0.306127	0.272331	14.0768
Korea	Won	0.000862	0.000767	0.0396
Euro	Euro	1.000000	0.889600	45.9834
Germany	Mark	0.511292	0.454845	23.5109
France	Franc	0.152450	0.135619	7.0101
Netherlands	Guilder	0.453780	0.403683	20.8664
Austria	Schilling	0.072673	0.064650	3.3418
Belgium	Franc	0.024790	0.022053	1.1399
Italy	Lire	0.000516	0.000459	0.0237
Finland	Markka	0.168188	0.149620	7.7339
Portugal	Escudo	0.004988	0.004437	0.2293
Spain	Peseta	0.006011	0.005347	0.2764
Luxemburg	Franc	0.024790	0.022053	1.1399
Ireland	Punt	1.269738	1.129559	58.3869

Goods-producing industries down in ailing Singapore

SINGAPORE—Singapore's goods-producing industries, comprising manufacturing and construction, contracted by 16.2 percent in the last three months of 2001 compared with the same quarter in 2000, the government announced on Wednesday.

The drop was mainly caused by a global decline in demand for electronic goods, the Ministry of Trade and Industry said in a report.

Electronics are the main exports for Singapore, a tiny city-state with no natural resources.

"The construction sector also remained sluggish. Services-producing industries (are) estimated to have declined further by 1.6 percent. Almost all sectors registered poorer performance," the ministry report said.

Singapore is one of Southeast Asia's wealthiest countries and has enjoyed decades of spectacular economic growth.

But the trade-dependent country is currently in the worst recession in its 36-year history as a nation.

Singapore has been hit hard by a drop in demand from the United States—Singapore's biggest export market—following the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

For the entire 2001, Singapore's goods-producing industries contracted by 9.3 percent, the ministry said on Wednesday in its preliminary or "flash" estimate report.

The data came a few days after the government said gross domestic product shrank by an estimated 2.2 percent last year, after 9.9-percent growth rate of growth in 2000.

Also on Wednesday, Singapore's central bank said it is narrowing the exchange-rate range within which it allows the local currency to fluctuate in value.

Economists said the move could signal a sign of slight optimism on the part of the financial authorities.

In October, the central bank or Monetary Authority of Singapore widened the exchange-rate range following the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States.

Analysts then said that widening the range would allow the Singapore dollar to weaken, making Singapore's exports cheaper and giving domestic products an edge over more expensive imports.

Song Seng Wun, an economist at G.K. Goh Research, said he thought Wednesday's narrowing of the range was "a little sign of optimism" on the part of the central bank that financial markets are stabilizing since the Sept. 11 attacks.

"It means they will not tolerate as much weakness as before" in the Singapore dollar, Song said.

"But it will still be weak," he said, noting that the range is still "relatively wide."

The Singapore dollar strengthened slightly past 1.85 against the US greenback to around 1.8495 on Wednesday shortly after the central bank's announcement.

But while the city-state is in its worst ever economic downturn, the 2.2-percent fall is better than the government expectation of a 3-percent decline, and there was a glimmer of hope for the coming year.

"There are some signs the economy may be bottoming out," the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) said in a statement.

In the fourth quarter, advance estimates show GDP shrank by 7 percent over the same period in 2000, following falls of 5.5 percent in the third quarter and 0.4 percent in the second.

But real GDP increased at an annualized 4.3 percent quarter-on-quarter, after declining at a rate of 10 percent for the previous three quarters, MAS said.

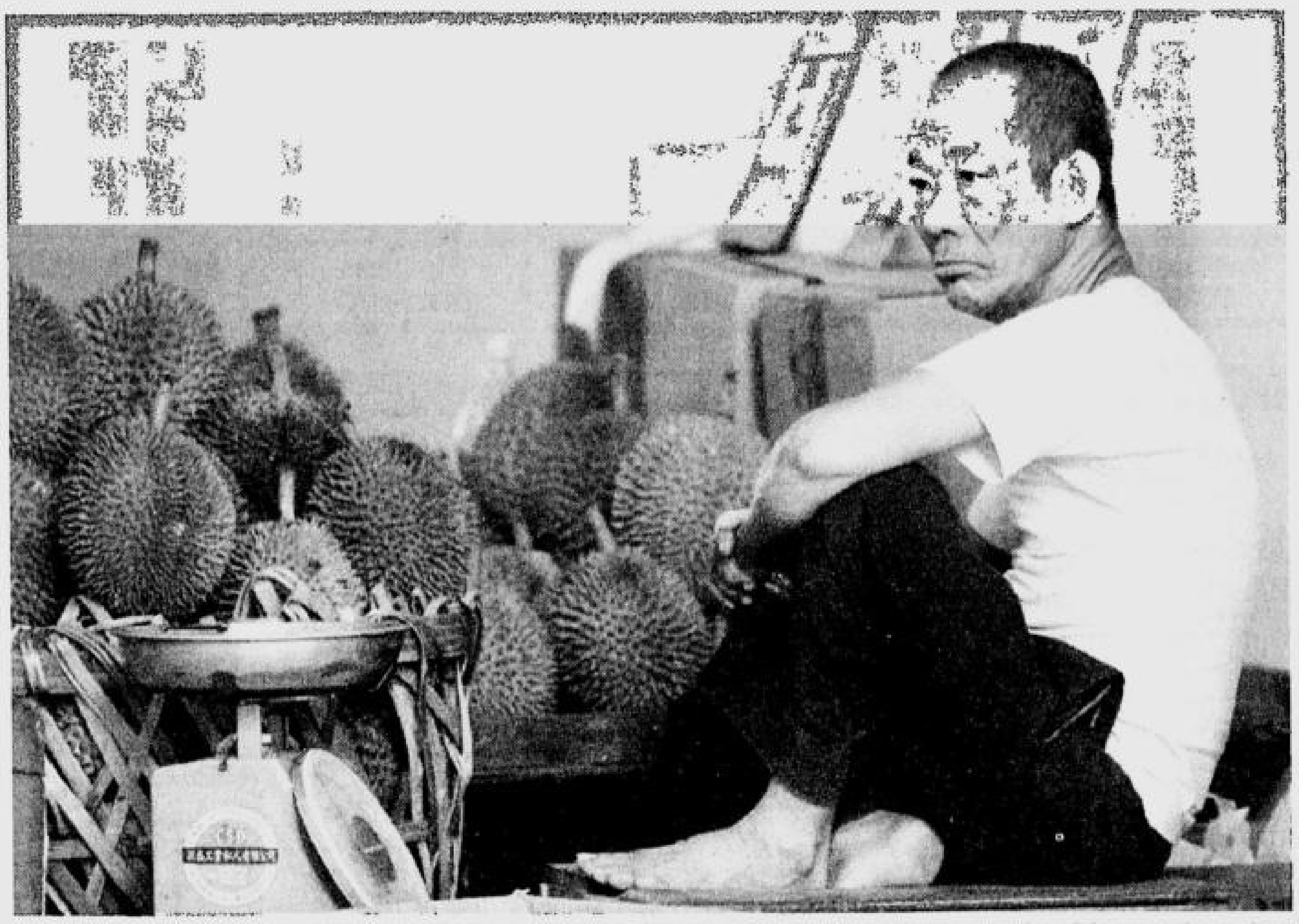
"Given the openness of the Singapore economy, our recovery hinges critically on the strength of the turnaround in the electronics industry and . . . some tentative positive signs have emerged in recent weeks," MAS said.

"However, we remain cautious about whether this is the start of a sustainable improvement, or merely a year-end seasonal pick-up in demand."

Given the uncertainties, the government has not revised its forecast GDP range for 2002 of between a 2-percent contraction and a 2-percent expansion.

MAS said it would maintain its neutral exchange rate policy reflecting a zero percent appreciation of the trade-weighted Singapore dollar.

For the full year, goods producing industries declined by 9.3 percent while the services industries grew marginally by 1.5 percent, the ministry said, computing fourth-quarter estimates from October and November figures. *AP, AFP*



A DURIAN seller waits for customers in Singapore, Monday. Singapore's recession-hit economy shrank by an estimated 2.2 percent in 2001, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong said on Monday, adding that the wealthy city-state must "remake" its economy to restore its heady growth rates of the past AP

Hyundai, Kia Motors sales hit record high as Daewoo's plunge

SEOUL—South Korea's largest automaker, Hyundai Motor Co., and its affiliate Kia Motors Co. lifted sales 5.7 percent to a record 2.6 million vehicles last year, they said Wednesday.

Hyundai Motor sold 1.6 million vehicles in 2001, up 4.3 percent from a year earlier, while Kia Motors sales came to 990,804, a rise of 7.5 percent.

"The 2001 sales figure hit a record high," Hyundai Motor said in a statement.

Hyundai Motor's domestic sales in 2001 rose 9.3 percent to 706,664 vehicles, with sports/utility vehicles up 30.4 percent at 146,817.

Passenger cars sales were up 4.9 percent at 328,962 units, and buses and trucks sales were up 4.8 percent at 230,885.

Exports rose 0.7 percent to 892,301 vehicles in 2001 on the back of a steady rise in demand for higher-end models in the US market, it said.

Hyundai Motor has set a sales target of 24 trillion won ($18.1 billion) or 1.68 million vehicles this year, Hyundai Motor chair Chung Mong-Koo said.

Kia Motor's domestic sales in 2001 climbed 4.7 percent to 391,784 vehicles on the back of solid demand for its utility models including Carens, Carnival II and New Bonggo.

Exports for 2001 stood at a record-high of 599,020, up from 547,581 in 2000, Kia said.

Sales by bankrupt Daewoo Motor Co. fell 40.7 percent to 448,613 vehicles last year, amid drawn out negotiations for a takeover by US giant General Motors. Exports fell 46.9 percent to 277,972 and domestic sales were down 29.7 percent at 170,741, it said.

However, it sold a total of 35,365 vehicles in December, a 13.6-percent rise from November and up 12.1 percent from a year earlier.

Daewoo creditors are seeking to complete a final deal to sell the ailing automaker to General Motors Corp. by Jan. 20, one of the main creditor banks said last week.

Meanwhile, the smallest South Korean automaker Renault Samsung Motors said its annual car sales more than quadrupled to 70,788 last year from 12,541 a year earlier. The rise in sales was due to stronger brand power and increased promotion after Renault took over the company in 2000, it said. *AFP*

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Europeans stock up on euro, but some still use old money

PARIS—From bakeries in Paris to newsstands in Vienna to cafés in Rome, Europeans tried out their new currency Tuesday. But many shops were closed for New Year's, and most customers wound up relying on their old familiar money for at least another day.

Most people got their first glimpse of the crisp, rainbow-hued euro bank notes when they stopped at automated teller machines on their way home from New Year's festivities. Others were handed the new bills as change when they went out for breakfast.

"It's funny to pay in francs and get this back," said Evelyne Patou, a customer in a Paris bakery, examining a pastel blue bank note. "It's like Monopoly money."

The euro, a decade in the works, became legal tender with the dawning of the new year. It is perhaps the most concrete evidence of Europe's transition from a divided continent to a team of nations working toward the same goals.

The 12 European Union nations that adopted the euro are parting with currencies that have long histories—such as Greece's drachma, which stretches back 2,600 years.

Things seemed to be running smoothly on the first day.

Emad Kolta, 49, who runs a newsstand in a subway station in Vienna, said he didn't feel completely prepared yet for the switch—but that so far, he had been able handle it, even though he had no euros to use as change.

"I thought this morning, if I come to work and have problems with the euro I'll just close the shop and open it back up tomorrow. But so far, I've had no problems," he said.

Reaction to the euro varied by country. In Belgium, people were eager to get their hands on the new money. Banksys, which administers most cash machines in Belgian stores and gas stations, noted a record number of withdrawals from midnight to 1 a.m. Tuesday—600 a minute.

In Finland, hundreds of people lined up outside Bank of Finland branches in the early morning.

In France, Finance Minister Laurent Fabius said the switch was going better than expected and forecast that 85 percent of francs would be pulled from circulation in only two weeks.

In laid-back Spain, 85 percent of ATM machines were dispensing euros by Tuesday afternoon, but people weren't rushing out to spend them. Some bars, coffee shops and restaurants in Madrid even shunned euros, albeit politely, saying they had no coins or bills to make change. Cafés in Rome, Paris and Vienna also said most of their clients paid with the old currencies.

In Italy, only about a third of ATMs were dispensing euros, according to the Italian Bankers Association.

The real test will come Wednesday, when the work week starts. To complicate matters, bank workers in Italy and France were expected to go on strike on Wednesday, pressuring management at a difficult time.

More than 15 billion bank notes and 52 billion coins—worth 646 billion euros, or $568 billion—have been produced for the switch. Depending on the country, people have up to two months to get used to their new currency while the old one is phased out.

During the transition, shopkeepers have devised ways to keep two different currencies straight. Some bakeries in Paris, for example, set up two separate cash registers—one for euros, one for francs. Some taxi drivers used two separate pouches to keep their change straight.

Even though officials urged people to use change for their purchases, many used large euro bills at cafés and newsstands—draining some shops of small bills and coins.

"I have only a little change," admitted Fabio Moschini, a cashier in a Roman bar, pointing to the 15 euro coins in his register. "I am afraid this week might be difficult."

To keep long lines moving, staff at the Eiffel Tower decided to accept only one currency—the euro—and directed visitors to a currency change stand under the tower's arching metal legs. Many visitors were annoyed.

"Why can't they have both?" said Sarah Wheatley, from Kent, Britain, who couldn't get hold of euros when she was preparing for her trip. Britain, Sweden and Denmark are the only EU countries that have not adopted the new currency.

In an interview in Vienna with The Associated Press, European Union Commission President Romano Prodi predicted the euro's debut would create a feeling of community that comes "from having the euro in your pocket."

Pope John Paul II also saluted the euro's arrival at a New Year's Day Mass, offering "a special wish for peace and prosperity to the nations of the European Union that, today with the single currency, accomplish a historical goal." *AP*

Asia telecom services market to grow 21 percent in 2002

SINGAPORE—The telecom services market in the Asia-Pacific region, excluding Japan, is forecast to grow 20.6 percent this year to $161 billion, research house International Data Corp. (IDC) said Wednesday.

The information technology (IT) market will also show significant growth of 13.5 percent to $76 billion, the IT market intelligence company said in its predictions for 2002.

"The global telecommunications market is about the same size as the global IT market. The fact that in Asia Pacific this market is twice the size of the IT market is due to the peculiar demographics of this region," IDC's regional managing director Piyush Singh said.

"It also underscores the latent demand for IT in the region," he said.

Telecom services will gain further momentum in 2003-2004 with the proliferation of broadband and IP services and the roll-out of 3G networks, the IDC report said.

"By 2005, this market will be worth around $269 billion, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 19 percent between 2001-2005."

Singh said the outlook for the overall info-communications market was underscored with "cautious optimism" with a reshuffling in demand for IT products and services since the Sept. 11 terror attacks in the United States.

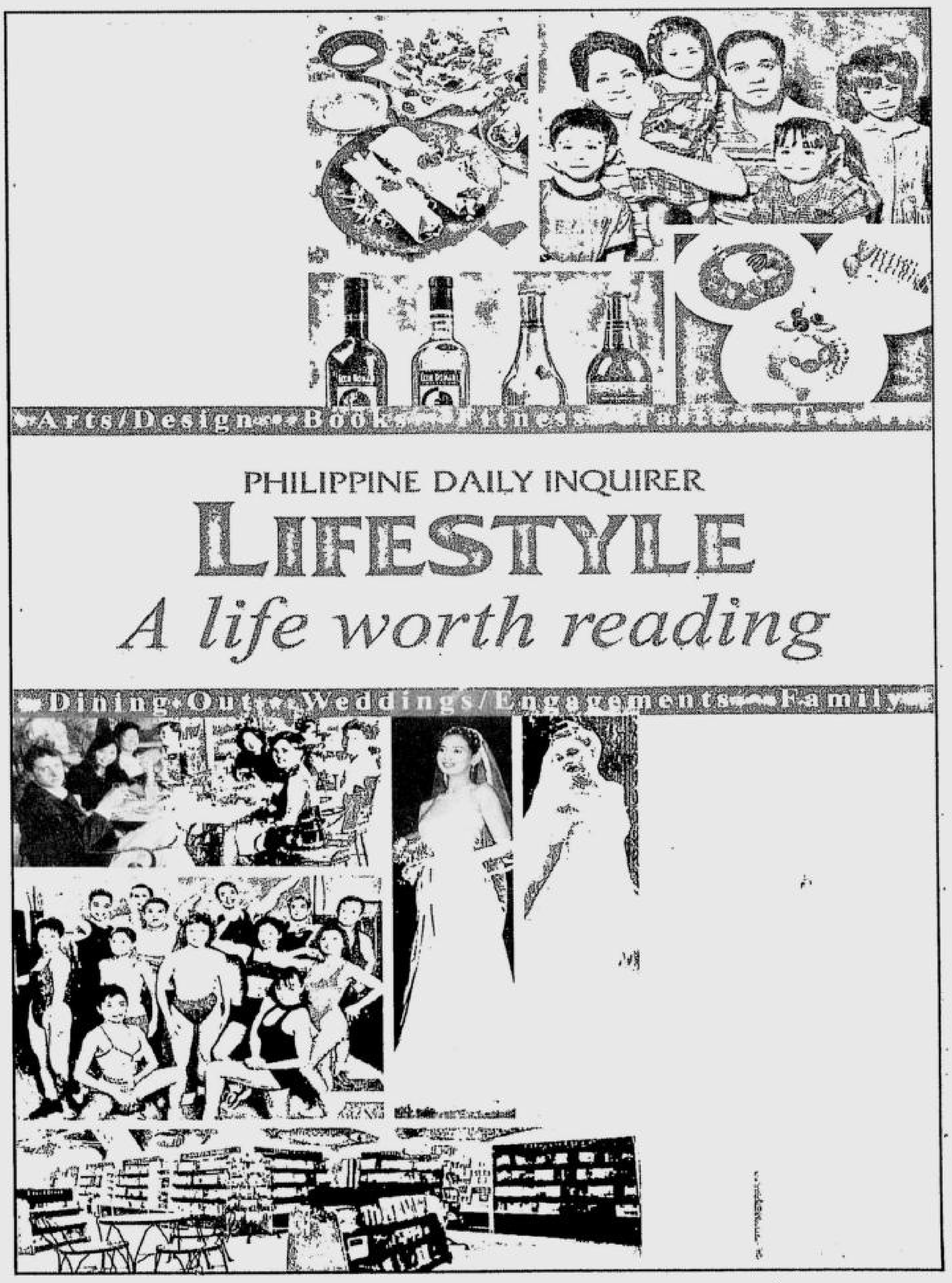
The attacks had an adverse impact on industry segments such as travel, transportation, tourism and insurance, and are redefining the demand for IT in Asia-Pacific, the report said.

"Some of the bright spots for 2002 for IT spending in the region will be the public sector, telecom industry and the life sciences segment," it said.

The Chinese IT market is expected to grow by 25 percent to $25.6 billion in 2002, aided by its entry into the World Trade Organization.

By 2005, the total IT market in China will be worth more than $50 billion, growing at a compound annual rate of 27 percent during 2001-2005, according to IDC.

Among other forecasts for 2002, IDC said global IT spending, Internet commerce and telecom services revenue would all pass the $1 trillion mark. *AFP*



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INQUIRER TRiViA
By BONG BARRAMEDA

Numbers

Numerologists say each number between 1 and 9 has its own special significance. The number 1 signifies dominance and leadership. Two represents gentleness, kindness, and lack of ambition. Three is the most "extrovert" number, denoting intelligence, creativity, and wit. Four is the number of fairness, dependability, organization, and attention to detail. Five is brilliance, cleverness, and impatience. Six is considered the "happiest" number, signifying balance, tranquility, loyalty, and sincerity. Seven is said to be the number of the loner, the philosopher, the mystic. Eight represents wordly success -- and egocentricity. And the number nine symbolizes the height of intellectual and spiritual attainment, so numerologists claim.

Ganito Sila Noon. During the Spanish regime, Filipinos, especially the Tagalogs, eagerly awaited a year with an "8." More so the year 1888, because it was folk-tale that Bernardo Carpio, legendary imprisoned King of Tagalogs, will break loose from his chains in the "year of eight." But nothing revolutionary happened. It took ten more years for the awaited dawn of liberation from the Hispanic colonial yoke to take shape with Aguinaldo's proclamation of the First Philippine Republic in 1898 (two "8's").

Past Forward. This day in 1957: Future four-time World Bowling Cup champion Rafael "Paeng" Nepomuceno was born.

WORD WATCH

Trophy (trow'fee) : from the Greek *tropaion*, meaning "token of an enemy's defeat."

PDI – January 3, 2002

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II. Project Title : **Earthworks and Slope Protection Works of PRII Expansion Area II**
III. Scope of Work : Clearing and grubbing to include removal of obstruction, excavation, backfilling, spreading and compaction up to the required elevation, completion of OHS perimeter fence enclosure and drainage manholes.
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5. Road Grader, 125 HP	2
6. Vibratory Compactor, Sheeps Foot, 9-10 Tons	3
7. Vibratory Compactor, Smooth Drum, 9-10 Tons	3
8. Water Truck, 10,000 Liters capacity	1

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XII. Eligibility Statement Forms : One (1) set each to be filled up and submitted for every project
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Place of Issuance and Submission of Accomplished Eligibility Statements/ Documents : PNOC - Petrochemical Development Corporation 11th Floor, B.A. Lepanto Building, 8747 Paseo de Roxas, Makati City c/o Legal, Contracts and Administration Department or PNOC - Petrochemical Development Corporation Petrochem Park, Batangas Dos, Mariveles, Bataan c/o Site Administration Department
Deadline of Submission : On or before **January 18, 2002** at 3:00 p.m.
XIII. Notice of Eligibility/Ineligibility
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XIV. Pre-bid Conference Date and Time : **March 7, 2002** at 9:30 a.m.
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(PDI – Dec. 22, 28, 2001 & Jan. 3, 2002)

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IN TODAY'S competitive business world, the companies that succeed are those who take communication seriously, provide the latest information and have the longest market reach. In a fast-evolving environment where technology outpaces almost any other factor in society, information and tools to propagate this easily become obsolete and customers develop changing information needs and more stringent demands from their service and product providers. To keep up and outpace competitors, companies need to be up-to-date, flexible and progressively relevant, in their trade and in their communication tools.

In the electronic data processing field, this is so; in the field of photography, this is so; more so, in the case of the printing sector because it is the printing process that multiplies the printed form into the desired volume level, the fastest and the most systematic way ever invented by man. Modern printing companies combine the function of being a press house and a desktop service provider. One *avant-garde* company which knows all these only too well is the AMCleofe Prints. This company is among those in the industry which invested considerably in order to bring to local customers a revolutionary printing technology to answer the need for speed, flexibility and quality output. With its DigiPrint Solution, business documents, from newsletters to brochures, to presentation kits, are created in a flash and in a way that allows one to custom print even for just one client, without compromising quality and affordability. The DigiPrint technology spells the following advantages: Speed (It can print while the customer waits, or at the longest, it can get the job done in 48 hours); Quality (It gives crisp, clear professional, full-color print that is expected from traditional printing); Savings (Placing additional orders for extra copies will not yield shocking quotations); No minimum prints (Most ideal for small-volume needs, one need no longer be turned away by press houses for insufficient volume requirement); Custom designs (It can produce communication materials tailor-suited to a "market-of-one" and enables the customer to make as many variations in design and text to suit the various demands of its clientele); On-demand print (Print only as many materials as needed; when needed) and Varied software options (One can choose among a wide range of software with which to execute a design. This means that even one's Powerpoint presentation, which used to be unacceptable for high-resolution printing, can now be used directly to produce full-color, high-image quality materials).

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Our Dearly Beloved

CONCHITA "CHIT" GIANZON BALAGOT

Peacefully joined her Creator on December 31, 2001 at the age of 64.

Loving wife to **Alberto M. Balagot**; beloved mother to **Ronnie** and **Marion**, **Bobby** and **Rica**, **Raymond** and **Pie**, **Butch** and **Geraldine** and **Pebbles**; doting grandmother to **Lia, Gitti, Nicole, Ardee, Pax, Chynna, Samantha** and **Jacob**; a source of comfort and strength to her sisters and in-laws, **Corazon** and **Leandro Santillan**; **Cyra** and **Nestor Villaceran, Cynthia** and **Chand Mehta** and all her relatives and friends.

Her remains lie in state at the Capilla Del Señor, Santuario de San Antonio, Forbes Park.

Interment will be on Saturday, January 5, 2002 at Manila Memorial Park, Sucat, Parañaque, after the 9:00 a.m. Mass.

ULRICO "Ricky" MONSURA SARMIENTO

of Marilao, Bulacan

Passed away in the Grace of our Lord on December 31, 2001.

His father **Pablo Sr.**; mother **Prescing**; brothers **Leonardo, Angelito, Pablo Jr., Oscar, Euly, Mario** and **Carlito**; sisters **Leonila, Imelda** & **Myrna** (†); relatives and friends mourn his passing and wish his eternal rest.

His body lies in state at the Northwing B Chapel of Funeraria Paz in G. Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

Interment will be on Saturday, January 5, 2002, 2:00 p.m. at Loyola Memorial Park, Parañaque.

Whoever serves me must follow me;
and where I am, my servant also will be.
John 12:16

MANUEL "Papang" CAUAN CASTAÑEDA, Sr.

of San Pablo, Isabela & Fairview, Quezon City

Peacefully joined his Creator on December 28, 2001
at the age of 65.

His wife **Lilia**; children **Lilibeth** (†), **Maria Estrellita** & **Hill**, **Melvin** & **Lala**, **Michael** & **May**, **Maria Elena** & **Nelson**, **Maria Elsa**, **Maria Eva** & **Keith** and **Manuel, Jr.**; grandchildren **Iaizza, Molee, Justhine, Maan, Marvin, Paulina, Tobiel, Gabrielle, Michael, Sarah, Hannah, Nykolle, Nadynne, Mikhail** and **Mattieu**; parents **Gavino** (†) and **Amanda** (†); brothers and sisters **Agapita** (†) & **Jose** (†), **Jovita, Bernandina** (†) & **Juan**, **Nena** & **Modesto**, **Nicolas** & **Rosita** and **Alberto** & **Leticia**, nieces, nephews, other relatives and friends request the pious readers to pray for the eternal peace of his soul.

His remains lie in state at the Asencion Chapel of the Good Shepherd Parish Church, Regalado Ave., Fairview Subd., Quezon City.

Cremation will be on Jan. 5, 2002 at the Funeraria Paz Crematorium, Araneta Ave., Quezon City.

I am the way the truth
and the life. No one
comes to the Father
except through me.
John 14:6

SK NARCISO C. MAGSINO
(Soseng)

(UPLB BS Agriculture CL '58)
(Past Grand Knight Tanauan Council 6141)

of Tanauan, Batangas peacefully passed away at the age of 65 on 01 January 2002.

His bereaved wife **Sabel**; his children **Rissa** and **Dennis**, **Pol** and **Lissa**, **Rico** and **Joreen**, **Cecil** and **Joseph**, **Ronnie** and **Mylene**, **Elmer**; brothers and sisters, grandchildren and all relatives request the kind readers to pray for his eternal rest.

His body lies in Tanauan Family residence.

Interment will be on 06 January 2002 at 1:00 p.m.

AIDA FLORO JOAQUIN

September 4, 1924 - January 1, 2002

Loving wife to the late **Col. Carlos Joaquin, Sr.**, and mother to **Susan** and **Manuel**, **Myrna**, **Carlos Jr.** and **Tess**, **Czarina** and **Ramon**, grandsons and granddaughters has peacefully joined her Creator; request pious readers to remember her in their prayers.

Her remains lie in state at the Christ the King Church, Green Meadows, Quezon City, Metro Manila.

Interment will be on January 5, 2002, 9:00 a.m. at Manila Memorial Park, Parañaque.

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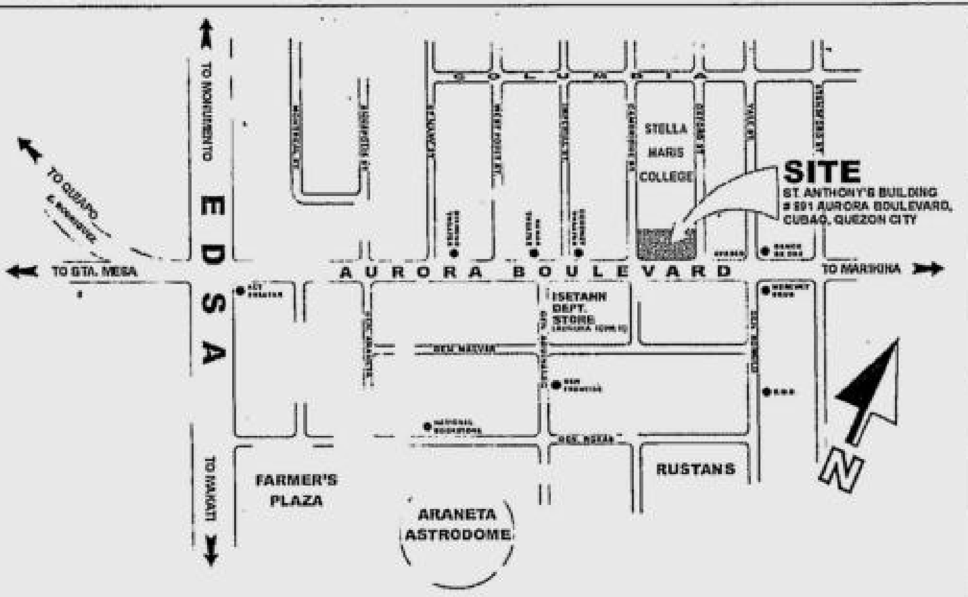

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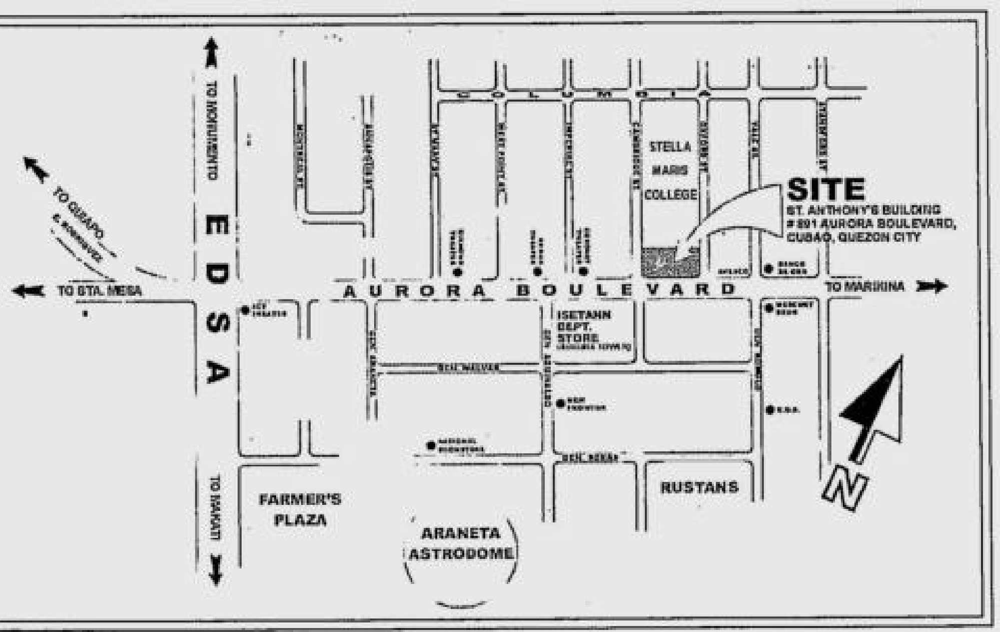

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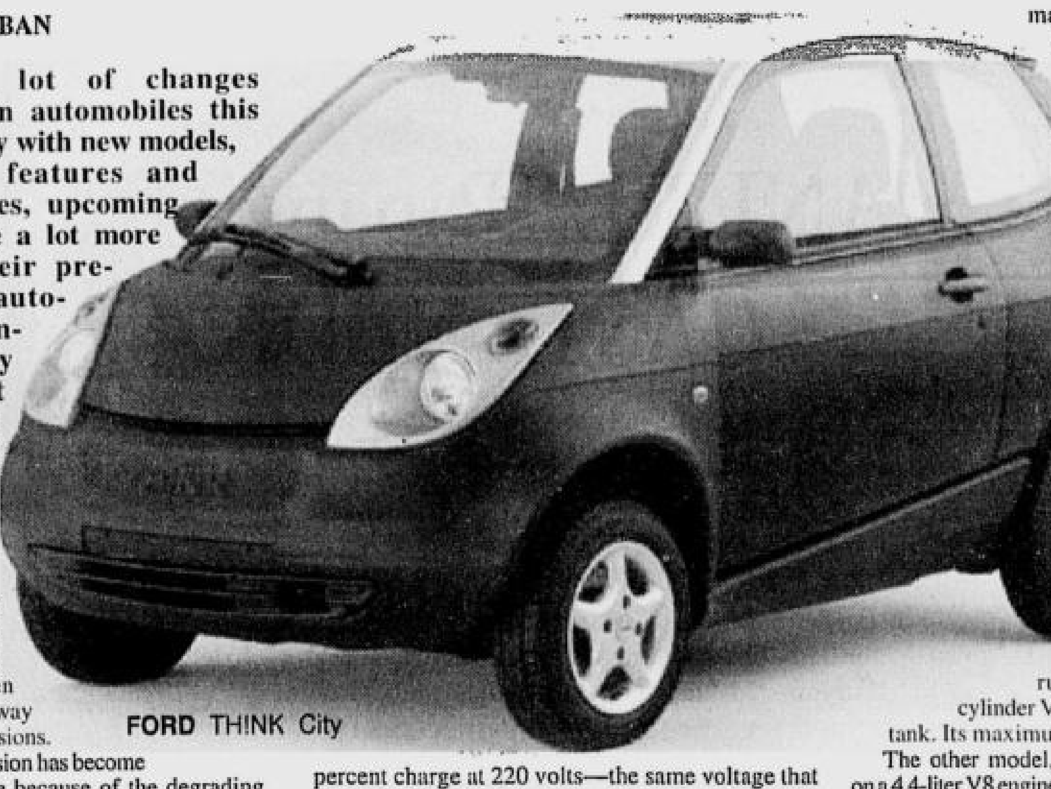
CESAR D. MANGAWANG, Editor

New breed of cars for 2002

BY CHARLES E. BUBAN



FORD THINK City

EXPECT a lot of changes happening in automobiles this year. Not only with new models, enhanced safety features and additional amenities, upcoming automobiles will be a lot more different than their predecessors. Some automobiles will be environment-friendly and fuel-efficient while others will carry different type of engines, those that will no longer depend on fossil-based fuels.

Worldwide, the use of clean fuels—low-lead or unleaded gasoline and low-sulfur diesel—has been proven as a cost-effective way of reducing vehicular emissions. Controlling vehicular emission has become a serious issue worldwide because of the degrading condition of the environment. Scientists by and large accept that Earth's climate is changing because of the amount of so-called greenhouse gases humans are pouring into the atmosphere. Most of those gases come from fossil fuels that vehicles and industries emit. With expanding motor vehicle population (growth rate is as high as 23 percent in rapidly growing economies such as China), concerns are much stronger at curbing vehicle emission.

TOYOTA RAV4-EV

Low-emission vehicles

As a result, car engines are now built to be more environment-friendly. This year, more and more automobile manufacturers are complying with the Low Emission Vehicles standards and Ford is leading the way in meeting the requirement. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, an LEV is one that emits at least 50 percent less smog forming emissions than the current government standards.

As of 1999, all Ford SUVs and Windstar minivans meet the stringent LEV standards. Since last year, all Ford cars as well as most Ford truck models are already LEV compliant.

This year, too, Ford is introducing in the United States, a redesigned version of the TH!NK City, a new car breed is already on sale in Scandinavian countries. The TH!NK City car is a fully enclosed two-seater with recyclable thermoplastic body panels designed for urban driving.

The TH!NK City car has a driving range of 85 km and a top speed of 90 kph. A liquid-cooled three-phase alternating current-induction motor powers the car. Its 19 recyclable nickel-cadmium (NiCad) batteries generate approximately 11.5-kilowatt-hours of energy to power the motor. The car uses a 220-volt/16-amp circuit with an off-board recharging station. It takes approximately eight hours to fully charge a drained battery and five hours to attain an 80 percent charge at 220 volts—the same voltage that runs most appliances.

New hybrid sedan

Honda is another company working to develop vehicles that are both more clean-burning and fuel-efficient. The Japanese automaker has just released a highly practical new sedan, the Civic Hybrid, which boasts of ultra-high fuel economy of 29.5 km per liter. This is currently the highest in the world for a 5-passenger gasoline-powered production vehicle.

The Civic Hybrid features a state-of-the-art VTEC cylinder cut-off system-equipped 1.3L i-DSI (Dual and Sequential Ignition) engine. The new engine incorporates i-DSI lean-burn combustion technology, along with the VTEC cylinder idling system that adapts Honda's VTEC variable valve control technology to significantly increase the amount of electrical energy recovered during deceleration.

This new engine is combined with an assist motor featuring improved performance, a more efficient Power Control Unit (PCU), and the Honda Multimatic S continuous variable transmission. The results are both ultra-high fuel economy and superior drivability.

Electricity-run SUV

Beginning February 2002, Toyota USA will be offering a sport utility vehicle that will no longer run on gas. The company has announced that it will begin selling the RAV4-EV (electric vehicle) to retail customers in California next month.

BMW 745h

The Toyota RAV4-EV is a zero emission, state-of-the-art electric version of the Japanese automaker's popular RAV4. The RAV4-EV will be powered by a maintenance-free, permanent magnet motor, producing 50kW of power (equivalent to a 67-horsepower gasoline engine). It has a top speed of 125.5 kph, and has a range of about 128 to 161 km per charge.

As a compact SUV with seating capacity for five and ample space for cargo, the RAV4 offers a level of flexibility not found in other EVs—4-wheel antilock brakes, alloy wheels, dual front airbags, air-conditioning, power-operated mirrors, windows and door locks, and a deluxe sound system with a CD player.

Hydrogen-powered vehicles

Perhaps, the most ambitious project for vehicle manufacturers is to be able to produce an engine that runs on hydrogen power. Hydrogen, the simplest and most abundant element in the universe, could be the best solution in solving both energy and clean air concerns.

Last year, the BMW Group addressed the issue by launching its cars during a world tour covering five key cities. During its CleanEnergy WorldTour 2001, the German automaker presented two variants of cars that utilize hydrogen.

The BMW 750 hL is the world's first liquid hydrogen-powered saloon. The sedan runs on bivalent 5.4 liter, 12-cylinder V-engine, with a 140-liter hydrogen tank. Its maximum speed is around 226 km/hour.

The other model, the BMW 745h Prototype runs on a 4.4-liter V8 engine which features bi-VANOS variable valve timing, Valvetronic variable intake runners, and a fully variable intake manifold. The car runs on either hydrogen or premium unleaded gasoline. Running on hydrogen, the 745h makes 184 horsepower and can achieve a top speed of around 214 mph. Cruising range is 306 km. Added to the 644-km range of the normal fuel tank, the 745h can go 965 km between fill-ups.

The auxiliary power unit of the 745h runs on a Polymer Electrolyte Membrane fuel cell that operates independently of the engine, thanks to a direct hydrogen feed from the trunk-mounted tank. This means power accessories like air-conditioning can be operated when the engine is shut off, and this system saves gas for every 235 miles of city driving.

The CleanEnergy WorldTour 2001 aims to direct the international public's eye to the highly advanced hydrogen technology, its benefits and the tasks which still need to be faced. BMW believes that only hydrogen fulfills the requirements of the fuel of the future. Produced with the aid of regenerative sources of energy such as the sun, it is the cleanest fuel there is.

Hydrogen fuel cell

Apart from the German automaker, DaimlerChrysler is also doing a similar research, this time on fuel cell utilizing hydrogen. At their facility in California, the company is experimenting on drivable, zero-emission and fuel cell cars.

DaimlerChrysler's Necar 4 (New Electric Car) is a major breakthrough in fuel cell technology because it was developed using a very powerful fuel cell system small enough to be packaged in a compact car. The Necar 4 uses fuel cell technology to generate electricity and water vapor. Based on a Mercedes-Benz A-class compact car, the Necar 4 can reach a top speed of about 145 kph and can travel nearly 450 km between refueling. In addition, engineers have been able to mount the complete fuel cell system in the vehicle floor for the first time, which could allow room for up to five passengers and plenty of cargo space.

The Necar 4 is powered by liquid hydrogen stored in a cryogenic cylinder resembling a large thermos at the rear of the vehicle. The fuel is then processed by a Proton Exchange Membrane Fuel Cell (PEMFC). Inside the PEMFC, a platinum-coated membrane separates hydrogen into protons and electrons and combines them with oxygen in the air to form water. This surplus and deficit of electrons and protons create positive and negative terminals that, when connected, produce electricity, which in turn, powers the vehicle.

On the road to Binirayan Festival

ON THE ROAD

Aida Sevilla-Mendoza

FOR A CHANGE, instead of traveling abroad this year-end I accepted an invitation, together with other journalists, to attend the most historically symbolic fiesta of our nation, the Binirayan Festival of Antique. The invitation was extended by Antique Gov. Sally Zaldivar-Perez, who was the Senate's Presidential Legislative Assistant in the Presidential Legislative Liaison Office of Malacañang before her election to her home province's top post last May.

The journey to San Jose de Buenavista, Antique's capital town, involves two hours of motoring from the airport of Iloilo City since San Jose Airport is non-operational. We took the coastal route in a minivan and on the way, stopped at Miag-ao, Iloilo province, to view the beautiful Spanish-vintage church there. A succulent lunch of "Binakol" or "Tino-om" native chicken, "alimusan" (a catfish dish), broiled squid, crabs, prawns, buko shake and "bandi" (peanuts baked with muscovado sugar) awaited us at the bucolic Rest Along the River Restaurant in Qui-anan, San Joaquin, near the Antique border.

Of Antique's total length of road of 1,807 kilometers, 11 percent is concrete, 4.4 percent is asphalted, 36.6 percent are gravel all-weather roads and 46 percent are earth roads. Some lengthy portions of the national highway in the hills were in poor condition and are reportedly scheduled for cementing.

Antique may not be as prosperous or as developed as its Panay island neighbors, Iloilo and Capiz, but it is rich in history. Antique's rich heritage is manifested in the Binirayan Festival, which was first celebrated in 1974 at the initiative of the late Gov. Evelio Javier, the province's beloved hero. The Binirayan Festival's high point is the "biray" (boat ride), a colorful full-costume-props beach theater reenacting the 13th century landing at Malandog, Hamtic of 10 Malayan chieftains led by Datu Puti from the Kingdom of Bornay (now Brunei) who were fleeing the cruel and oppressive rule of their sultan. The saga of the their voyage, Datu Sumakwel's settlement in Antique and the promulgation of the Code of Sumakwel therefrom is recounted in the Maragtas and by oral tradition. From Antique, according to art and culture writer Lorna Montilla, the other datus eventually sailed to and settled in Cebu, Negros Occidental, Laguna, Pampanga, Taal and Sta. Ana, Manila. It was probably in this way that our civilization of freedom and justice began before Spain colonized our islands.

Going back to the motoring aspect, we noticed that as we approached San Jose, the condition of the road improved. Air-conditioned buses leave for San Jose from Iloilo City every 30 minutes until 4 p.m. daily and Department of Tourism-accredited Mitsubishi L300 vans and Toyota Tamaraw FX's operate for hire between Iloilo and San Jose 24 hours a day.

Within San Jose and environs, aside from the big, extended jeepneys with car-like frontages similar to those in Iloilo City, the "multicab" is a means of public transportation. The multicab is a Suzuki Carry-all whose cargo box is converted to provide parallel bench seats that can accommodate up to 10 passengers.

Aside from the annual Binirayan Festival, Antique has a wealth of natural wonders—white-sand beaches, coral reefs, hot springs, lakes, waterfalls, rainforests and mountains—that should attract ecotourists and nature lovers. However, its infrastructure and tourist facilities need to be upgraded. Gov. Sally Perez, thank heaven, is giving top priority to tourism development as evidenced by her signing a memorandum of agreement last Friday in Hamtic with Aklan Gov. Florencio Miraflores and Tourism Secretary Richard Gordon for a tourism promotion twinning arrangement between Antique and neighbor province Aklan, which includes Boracay.

* * *

TODAY'S BUMPER STICKER: The earth does not belong to us. We belong to the earth.

* * *

E-mail comments to aida_sevilla@pacific.net.ph

HCMI Mileage Plus launched

HONDA Cars Makati Inc. with branches—Honda Cars Makati, Honda Cars Pasig, Honda Cars Alabang and Honda Cars Shaw—in partnership with Pilipinas Shell-Velocity and Shell Helix introduces the HCMI Mileage Plus Frequency Program to its valued customers. The program was formally launched in an appreciation party held recently at the Honda Cars Makati Showroom.

In celebration of its 10th anniversary, HCMI introduced the HCMI Mileage Plus as a way of thanking loyal customers for 10 years of continued patronage. It is a service frequency benefit given to all Honda car owners who get their vehicle serviced at any HCMI dealership.

The HCMI Mileage Plus entitles Honda car owners to outright discounts for purchases of parts and/or accessories as well as discounts on labor charges for general repair, body repair and/or paint services. The Preventive Maintenance Services Frequency Card on the other hand, rewards customers with cash coupons and free services for their regular preventive maintenance service availments.

Membership to the HCMI Mileage Plus is free and application forms are available at any Honda Cars Makati Inc. dealerships.

Prestige Cars Makati's Pre-Owned BMW's.
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Why settle for less when you can get the BMW you really want! Prestige Makati now makes choice pre-owned BMW's available to those who value desirable, well-kept, precision engineered cars. Just call **892-8127 to 29** and ask about our current stock of pristine, fully loaded vehicles:

2001 318iA Exec, silver on red leather, low mileage demo unit. Impeccable. Warr.+ins. inc. 1.8M

2001 523iA, white on black leather, low mileage demo w/ warr.+ins. A 5 Series at a 3 Series price. 2.7M

2000 318i, silver on gray leather. Full service history, another excellent purchase at 1.3M.

1999 323iA, red on black leather. Just 12,000 kms. run w/ full service histrory Smooth six-cylinder power for just 1.6M

1997 316i, white on black fabric. 22,000 easy kms. Flawless w/ full service history. Excellent value, 800T.

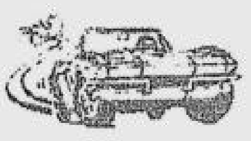
1994 325iA, red on white leather. Special U.S. model. Sunroof, sports seats & suspension, 17" alloys. An enthusiast's delight for 1.3M

Prestige Cars Makati

Kennon Road dying a slow, sure death

FULL TANK

Al S. Mendoza



THE LETTER-WRITER I picked to jump-start my year is Hilario G. Subido, an engineer from Baguio City.

Dear Al,

After reading your piece about Kennon Road (Full Tank, 12/13/01), I could not restrain myself from reacting to it.

I have been traveling this road since 1960 when I started living in Baguio City, and I cannot help but observe that this route is dying a slow, but sure death.

From the early '60s up to the '80s, it took only about 30 minutes to negotiate the route from the city to the tollgate at Camp One, with leisurely driving. Now it takes twice the time, or even longer, to travel the same distance.

The earthquake of July 16, 1990, destroyed the road in many sections, and was not passable for a long time. Since then however, there was supposed to be a massive rehabilitation where hundreds of millions, if not billions of pesos, were poured out, but the problems kept coming back, year in and year out.

There was a highways regional director who awarded projects not based on engineering know-how but based on the so-called S.O.P. (you know what I mean). Since the works were classified as "emergency projects," they were awarded to friends and associates who were not even contractors, and these people sold the contracts to other parties, minus their usual percentage cuts. This eventually resulted in substandard projects that gave way with the first onset of the rainy season.

I think that it is safe to say that if all the money poured into the so-called "rehabilitation of Kennon Road" during the last 10 years was spent wisely, this road could have been one of the best, if not the best, mountain road in the country.

Another observation that I have noticed is that the road officials do not do anything while the problem is still small. They wait until the damage becomes large and the road impassable. This then results in a bigger appropriation, a bigger contract, and a bigger you-know-what. This will also enable them to classify the job as an "emergency work" that can be awarded to a favorite friend or a crony, sans bidding.

I can think of one possible solution: offer the rehabilitation of this road artery on a build/operate and maintain basis, and make the toll rates and terms realistic to attract private investors.

The savings in fuel for cars using the next alternate highway, Marcos Highway, is about three liters, and for trucks and buses, about twice the amount they normally use. If the toll operator is allowed to collect P60 for cars and a double amount for trucks and buses, investors might show interest. Also consider the time saved and the wear-and-tear the vehicles are subjected to. I think you will agree that Kennon Road is the most scenic route coming up to Baguio, and that pleasure comes as a bonus. What more if the road gave both driver and passenger a comfortable feel?

But then I think this is just a dream. The people in government will surely vehemently oppose this scheme because it will mean the end of their perennial source of daily bread-and-butter, in the form of the so-called S.O.P.

But then again Al, we can dream, can't we?

P.S. I heard that you are from Mangatarem (Pangasinan). When my father-in-law was still alive, his best friend was from your town—Mama Goding (Sison), who was the provincial academic supervisor. He never failed to drop by our house in Lingayen whenever he was in town.

* * *

Thank you, kabaleyan. And, yes, Mama Goding. His wife, Madam Soling, was my Grade 3 teacher. Mama Goding has passed away but not Madam Soling, who is still going strong at age 92.

Increased sales of Asian passenger vehicles seen

DESPITE the slump in the economy, Centro Manufacturing Production, body maker of the Isuzu passenger van (IPV), foresees increasing sales volume for the Asian passenger van.

Production manager Bong Viñas attributes this forecast to the Filipino's ability to cope with the hard times.

Says Viñas: "Filipinos tend to put up their own businesses during an economic crisis. They go into school bus operation, public utility vehicle service, delivery contractor and other small-scale enterprises to augment the family income."

The Asian passenger van has long been the vehicle of choice for entrepreneurs and the Isuzu passenger van brings together the form of a passenger vehicle and the function of a utility vehicle.

Since it looks and feels more like a car rather than a van, customer satisfaction on the IPV is on the rise. Among the car-like features of the IPV that have been drawing praise are quicker and easier access to the engine (making maintenance less of a hassle), ergonomic seats, readily recognizable meter panel, easy-to-reach controls and superb suspension.

The latest improvements on the IPV design, which allow entrepreneurs a bigger return of their investment, include the following:

- Bigger seating arrangement.
- Split-type rear benches to allow loading of both passengers and cargo.
- Twin door opening equipped with straps.
- Powerful dual air-con .
- An efficient and durable Isuzu engine.

ISUZU passenger van

People, Events & Products

ARIES B. ESPINOSA, Editor
aespinosa@inquirer.com.ph

All about 'wiring' the brain right

NEURONS are supposed to be granular cells, the fundamental functional units of nervous tissue that perform specialized processes. This paraphrased definition from a dictionary makes little sense to non-scientists until we realize that a child is born with about 100 billion brain neurons. Between the ages of three and eight, a child's brain will have twice as many neurons and twice as many connections between these neurons than in an adult's brain.

For educators and other individuals concerned with childhood development, the implication is that the experiences of early childhood will have a lasting effect on a person's learning capacity.

"This is precisely why we give so much importance to early childhood education," says Rossana L. Llenado, founder and director of Preparation for the World Ahead (WorldPrep), a progressive pre-school in Loyola Heights, Quezon City.

Unlike other parts of human body, the brain develops rapidly during the early stages of life. Research has shown that the human brain reaches half its final mature weight at about six months and 90 percent of its final weight by the age of eight years.

It also has been found that while there is an overproduction of neurons between the ages of three and eight, making it possible for the brain to adapt to any condition, neurons start to be pruned during the teen years. The only neurons that survive are those that are reinforced by experience.

It isn't just the neurons but the connections between them.

"Researchers on brain development talk about 'wiring' the circuits of the brain for functions such as physical activity, music and math," Llenado points out.

Llenado adds that his "wiring" through the provision of relevant experiences is particularly important during the critical periods in an individual's development. These critical periods were identified by Sharon Begley in a Newsweek article "Your Child's Brain" (Feb. 19, 1996) as ages 0 to 2 for emotional control and social attachment, ages 0 to 3 for vocabulary, ages 1 to 4 for mathematics and logic, ages 3 to 10 for music and ages 0 to 10 for second language.

"What research is telling us is that the education or the experiences that a child gets even before he is eligible for admission to the formal school system may very well determine how he performs in school and later on in the workplace," Llenado observes.

It was precisely to address this need for relevant early childhood experiences that Llenado establishes WorldPrep last May. Its curriculum covers language and thinking skills, mathematics, music and art, psychomotor skills, science, Filipino and Mandarin.

"Our emphasis is not so much on what is learned but on the process and culture of learning. We teach children how to learn so that they may be prepared to face whatever challenges the future world may bring," Llenado says.

As research has indicated, the influence of one's early environment on the brain is long-lasting, affecting not only the number of brain cells and their connections, but the "wiring" of such connections as well. If the brain is not stimulated during the critical periods of its development, stimulation at a later time becomes difficult, perhaps even impossible.

Observes Llenado: "It is during the pre-school years that we build a child's capacity to learn. And it is something he will bring with him all his life."

Where the human brain is concerned, it's not how you finish that matters most. It's how you start.

NESTLE CHAIR APPOINTED TO GAC

President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo recently appointed Nestle Philippines chair and CEO Juan B. Santos a member of the Governance Advisory Council (GAC), an organization of business leaders tasked to formulate a national governance reform agenda to promote the global competitiveness of the Philippines and increase local and foreign investor confidence. The Council will serve as an advisory body to the President on policies, programs and courses of action that will raise the country's standing in the international business community. It is also tasked to promote governance reform initiatives and develop a framework of cooperation between private and government sectors. Other members of the GAC are Washington Sycip, Ricardo Romulo and Ernesto Garilao with Jesus Estanislao and Miguel Luz as chair and executive director, respectively.

AYALA LIFE ASSURANCE COVERS GREENWICH

Ayala Life Assurance Inc. was recently awarded the contract to provide Group Life insurance coverage to the employees of Greenwich Pizza Corp. Present during the contract signing were (seated, from left) Rufino Dela Rosa, president, Greenwich Pizza Corp; Alfonso L. Salcedo, Jr., president, Ayala Life and Nellie Merida, AVP, Ayala Life. Standing (from left) are Erwin Castillo, compensation and benefits specialist, Greenwich Pizza Corp. and Eric Calderon, corporate marketing manager, Ayala Life. Ayala Life is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Bank of the Philippine Islands.

Feel the rush in Stallone's bumpiest film

HOLD on to your seatbelts--tight. This will be a bumpy ride--900 million spectators, 250 miles per hour, 20 races and 1 championship. Are you ready to feel the rush?

C-Interactive Digital Entertainment "The Video to C" with Wave 89.1, Men Zone Magazine, Allegro Café Italiano and Trapik.com proudly releases on original video the 'greatest racing movie of the year' – "Driven". A $95-million production, it topbills Hollywood heavyweight Sylvester Stallone, Academy Award winner Burt Reynolds, rising teen star Kip Pardue ("Remember The Titans"), German superstar Til Schweiger and Sports Illustrated swimsuit model Estella Warren ("Planet of the Apes").

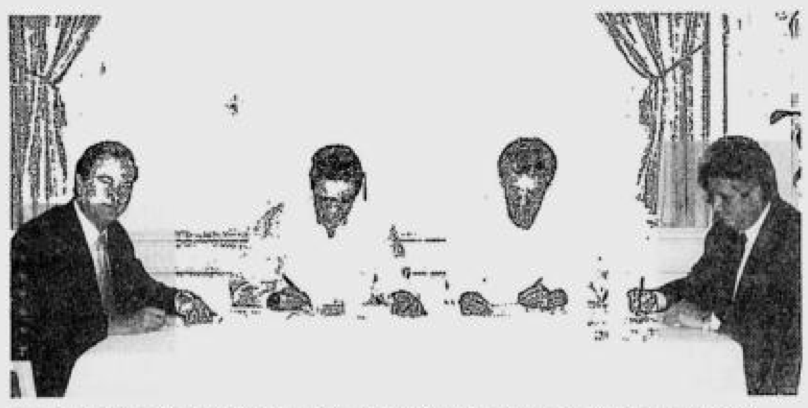
In the story, Stallone plays Joe Tanto whose colorful racing career has spun out of control after a near-fatal crash. While on retirement in his suburban home, he receives an unexpected call from his handicapped seasoned race car owner Carl Henry and asks him to go back to the race track, but not as an ace driver, but as support to the tour's golden boy Jimmy Bly. Naive and quiet but confused, the young driver has excess baggage of his own. Faced with insurmountable pressure to be on top, he is accompanied with an overly ambitious promoter/brother and a "special feeling" towards the girlfriend of his arch nemesis Beau Branderberg. Joe's main goal is to put Jimmy right back on track and put extra fire behind the season's flavor of the month.

"Driven" does not only boast of its powerhouse cast and riveting storyline but also struts the technology of racing and filmmaking. Director Renny Harlin ("Cliffhanger") engineered and assembled the film in a dizzying collage of images intended to stimulate visual senses. Backed with a music video-style cinematography and eye-popping three-dimensional images, the audience is in the driver's seat and in the center of action – a truly amazing viewing experience.

So feel the rush and fury of racetrack glory in the privacy of your home. Call C-Interactive Hotline 245-5011 (Manila), 032-412-1948 (Cebu) and 082-221-0405 (Davao).

BSP GOVERNOR AT BAIPHIL ANNIVERSARY

BSP Governor Rafael B. Buenaventura, guest of honor and keynote speaker during the Bankers Institute of the Philippines Inc. (BAIPhil) 60th anniversary, poses with BAIPhil officers and members. Shown are (from left) BDO SVP Lydia C. King, BAIPhil past president Josie Padua, BAIPhil immediate past president and Planters Bank SVP Ma. Agnes J. Angeles, BAIPhil first vice president and UOB Philippines EVP Isabelita M. Papa, BSP deputy governor Alberto Reyes, BAIPhil past president and PNB director Flor Gozon-Tarriela and Marivic Rufino Buenaventura.



MANDARIN ORIENTAL EXTENDS LEASE CONTRACT

In time with its silver anniversary celebration in 2001, Mandarin Oriental renews for another 25 years its lease contract with Ayala Land Inc. Located at the heart of the Makati business district, Mandarin Oriental was voted for the second consecutive year as the best business hotel in the Philippines by Bloomberg Television and Business Asia. Present during the contract signing were (from left) Helmut Gaisberger, Mandarin Oriental's general manager; Francisco Licuanan, president of Ayala Land Inc.; Aloysius B. Colayco, chair of Manila Mandarin Hotel Inc. and Constantino Vafopulous, vice president and chief operating officer of Ayala Hotels Inc.

Interesting products, interest-free

TWO models of Sharp's futuristic liquid crystal display (LCD) audio video monitors are now available: the 51cm (15-inch) and 30.7 cm (12-inch) low-reflection, high-brilliance and wide-viewing angle screens. Slim, space-saving and lightweight, these LCD AV monitors are fit for varied applications in the home, office, showroom or vehicle. Also available now are Sharp's portable mini disc recorders – the latest in digital audio technology. the MD (or mini disc) is destined to replace conventional analogue tapes – thanks to the many advantages it brings in terms of digital recording, editing, random access, sound quality and portability.

Users can even record over a million times without loss of quality on a small MD almost half the size of a regular compact disc. And with its shock-resistant memory, you can enjoy digital music almost anywhere while doing almost anything.

Keep You Out of the Game.
APC

APC APPOINTS NEW DISTRIBUTOR

World-leading provider of power protection and power manageability solutions, American Power Conversion (APC) has recently signed an agreement with Innovista Technologies Inc. appointing it as an APC distributor. In the agreement, Innovista shall distribute APC's power management accessories and its line of uninterruptible power supplies (UPS) which includes the Smart-UPS, Matrix and the Back-UPS series. With this new partnership APC products will become more easily available to the Soho (small office and home office) and provincial markets. Shown is APC Asean country general manager Larry Truong (second from left) and Innovista general manager Alex Chan (third from left) signing the agreement. Also at the contract signing are APC Philippines country manager Jason Lim (first from left) and Innovista product manager Gilbert Bencito (fourth from left).

ARANG HIGH SCHOOL
NOVEMBER 7, 2001

MOA ON INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

Gil B. Genio, Globe Telecom SVP/Islacom COO (right) signs a memorandum of agreement (MOA) with Roberto R. Romulo, Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development (Fit-Ed) chair (left), to bring a new world of learning and opportunity to students in public high schools. Parang High School in Marikina City, which has a student population of over 4,600, is the first of a number of secondary schools to be provided by Globe with free Internet connection for one year and discounted Internet rates for the succeeding years. Fit-Ed and Globe/Islacom have joined together to build a network of schools throughout the country that will leverage the Internet to better prepare the Filipino youth for the demands of the knowledge economy.

Aspac wins Platinum for Nokia ad

ASPAC Advertising, the Challenger Agency, got the Platinum Award, the highest recognition for an advertising campaign, for its Nokia TV ad "Car" voted as the Best in TV/Cinema, at the 17th Philippine Advertising Congress Araw Awards held at the Waterfront Hotel in Cebu.

Of the 3,000 entries submitted, only three ad campaigns were awarded the Platinum, the prize equivalent of a perfect score voted on by a committee of top names in the industry in the biannual competition.

The Nokia ad "Car" is a part of a TV/Cinema/Print campaign called Nokia Phonethics, which advocates responsible use of mobile phones.

Aspac also won for Nokia Gold for Low Budget TV production, Silver for TV/Cinema, Silver for multi-media campaign, and 5 Bronze medals for best print and best technical production.

For its LBC Express TV campaigns, Aspac took home bronze medals. While the agency's website and self-promotions campaign also earned bronze medals.

Aspac Advertising, the Challenger Agency, is a member of the Bates Worldwide Network, servicing clients such as Nokia, Wrigley, Metrobank, LBC among others.

DELL
COMPUTER SYSTEMS, INC.
NERSH

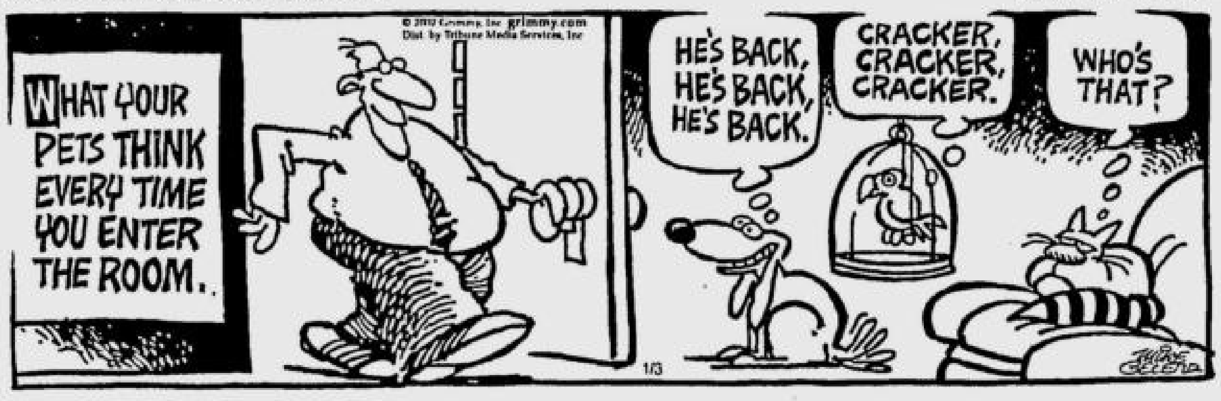
DELL, ICS PARTNERSHIP LAUNCH

Dell Computer Corp. has formed a partnership with Integrated Computer Systems Inc. (ICS) to distribute its popular range of computing products in the Philippines. Shown are Wilson Lim, ICS executive vice president; George Barcelon, ICS president; Jimmy Yam, Dell APD managing director, and Irene Go, Dell Philippines country manager. For more information about Dell products, call ICS at 727-3801.

MRAP COMPLETES BOARD OF EXAMINERS

The Medical Representative Accreditation Program (MRAP) recently completed its list of Board of Examiners from various organizations in the health industry. Shown is the distinguished Board of Examiners composed of (standing, from left) Dr. Winnie Siao, president of Philippine Academy of Family Physicians; Dr. Tony Ramos, Philippine Medical Association; Ed Mariano, executive director, Association of Pharmaceutical Trainers; Manuel Galias, executive director, Marketing Executives of the Pharmaceutical Industry (Mepi); seated (from left) Dr. Antonio Lopez, Undersecretary, Department of Health, represented by Dr. Teng Dioko; Dr. Nery Calimon, president, Philippine College of Pharmaceutical Medicine (PCPM) and Agnes Santos of Ancilla Enterprise Development Consulting.

MOTHER GOOSE & GRIMM BY MIKE PETERS


WHAT YOUR PETS THINK EVERY TIME YOU ENTER THE ROOM.
HE'S BACK, HE'S BACK, HE'S BACK.
CRACKER, CRACKER, CRACKER.
WHO'S THAT?
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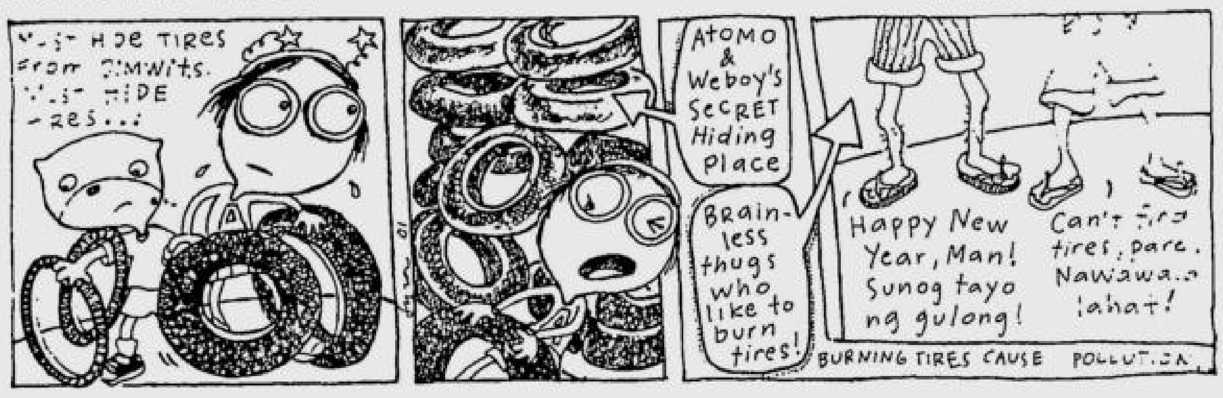
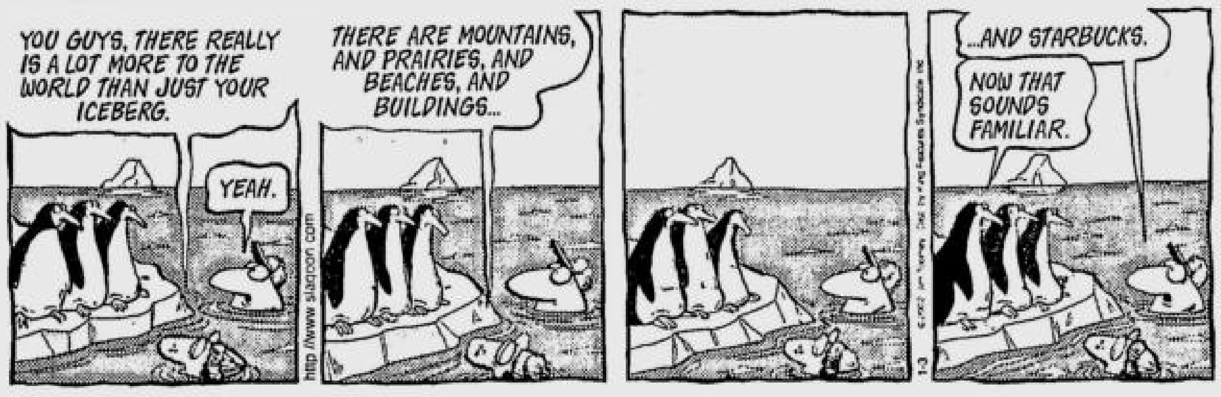
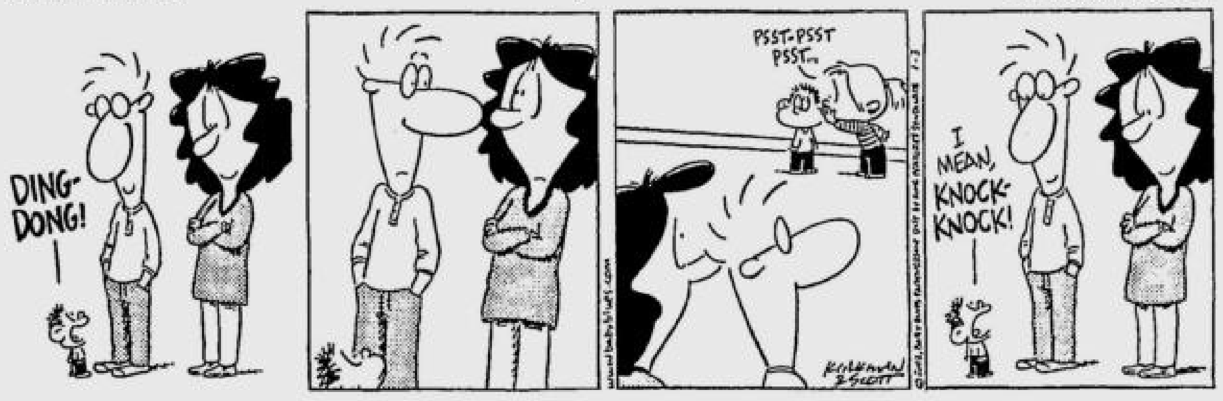
ATOMO AND WEBOY BY LYRA GARCELLANO


Must hide tires from dimwits. Must hide tires...
Atomo & Weboy's Secret Hiding Place
Brainless thugs who like to burn tires!
Happy New Year, Man! Sunog tayo ng gulong!
Can't find tires, pare. Nawawala lahat!
BURNING TIRES CAUSE POLLUTION

SHERMAN'S LAGOON BY JIM TOOMEY


YOU GUYS, THERE REALLY IS A LOT MORE TO THE WORLD THAN JUST YOUR ICEBERG.
YEAH.
THERE ARE MOUNTAINS, AND PRAIRIES, AND BEACHES, AND BUILDINGS...
...AND STARBUCKS.
NOW THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR.
http://www.slagoon.com

BABY BLUES BY JERRY SCOTT


DING-DONG!
PSST-PSST PSST...
I MEAN, KNOCK-KNOCK!
www.babyblues.com
KIRKMAN & SCOTT

HOROSCOPE

BY EUGENIA LAST

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Danica McKellar, Victoria Principal, Bobby Hull, Mel Gibson

Happy Birthday: You will instinctively know what you should do in order to get ahead. Set your game plan and don't stop until you reach your desired goals. You will be proud of yourself and your efforts if you are relentless in your pursuits. Your numbers are 8, 22, 34, 37, 45, 49

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Stick to your resolution even if it is difficult. Don't let anyone influence your decision to put a stop to bad habits.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20)): You'll be ready to take on the world. Your ideas may not be all that exciting but they will be sound. Your dedication will pay off.

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Think twice before you put someone ahead of yourself. It's time to look out for your own interests.

CANCER (June 21-July 22): You will have so much to do and so many people to deal with today. Slow down and be sure to enjoy a bit of your day.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Focus on making money and getting ahead. If you just want to have fun you will fall short of your goals and lose self-esteem.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): You will be eager to get to the bottom of whatever it is that is occupying your mind. Take heed of the advice given by a trusted friend.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Someone may be trying to undermine you. Be prepared to show your work in detail. Don't allow anyone to take credit for what you have done yourself.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Don't sit back waiting for someone to approach you. Take the initiative and make things happen. Take control of your destiny.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21): You may want to go out and do some wild and crazy things, but if you do you'll be playing with fire. You must take all precautions to do the right thing and what's best for you.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): You've got a plan; follow through with it. If you are forthright you will be successful.

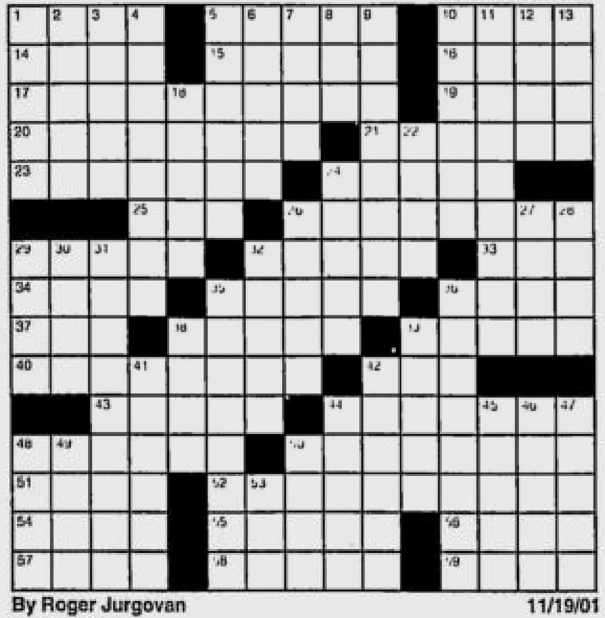
AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): You must be prepared to keep a secret for the time being. This could turn out to be a great year if you proceed with caution.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Romantic opportunities will unfold if you attend cultural events. Don't be afraid to approach someone who interests you.

Birthday Baby: You will ponder everythi[illegible] you [illegible] desire to do things to p[illegible] to be and do everyo[illegible] will be well received by others, but it may cause problems for you.

DAILY CROSSWORD

TMSPuzzles@aol.com



By Roger Jurgovan
Potomac, MD

11/19/01

ACROSS
1 Burden
5 Perimeters
10 Added years
14 Musical Porter
15 Mil. address, casually
16 Actress Garr
17 Life cycle stage
19 Exxon, once
20 Without partners
21 Speaks with pomposity
23 Employment summaries
24 Tense situation
25 Some French
26 Stalwart
29 Conclude from evidence
32 Life cycle stage
33 L. Bird's alma mater
34 New Mexico town
35 Siamese fighting fish
36 Dirt
37 EMT's procedure
38 Life cycle stage
39 Obtuse
40 Suspended perches
42 Sun. homily
43 Emanations
44 Fix one's eyes upon
48 Fulmar
50 "The Four Seasons" star
51 Pieces of pelvises
52 Life cycle stage
54 Implement
55 Odorific compound
56 TV sports award
57 Blyth and Jillian
58 Swell
59 Stiff hair

DOWN
1 Come to pass
2 Nary a soul
3 Arm bones
4 [illegible]ates
5 Spots
6 Goes out with
7 Framework
8 Freudian concept
9 La Paz lass
10 Special Forces units
11 Life cycle stage
12 Gaelic tongue
13 God in Guadalajara
18 Gantry or Fudd
22 Cam __ Bay, Vietnam
24 Vader or Maul
26 Padded gloves
27 Sale-tag disclaimer
28 Christmas season
29 Irritating tingle
30 Wine county in California
31 Life cycle stage
32 Bills
35 Stilled
36 Creates a jagged edge
37 French book illustrator
39 Country singer Carter
41 Wall art
42 Van Gogh's "__ Night"
44 Twisted sideways
45 Beethoven's "Fur __"
46 Ratify
47 Country singer Tucker
48 Pocket bread
49 North Carolina college
50 Business letter abbr.
53 King of Judea

PREVIOUS PUZZLE ANSWER

A	S	T	R	I	D	E	■	O	U	T	W	A	R	D
C	H	O	O	S	E	Y	■	C	L	A	I	M	E	R
H	A	M	B	O	N	E	■	C	E	N	T	A	V	O
I	R	K	■	T	I	L	■	A	N	T	■	D	E	W
E	P	I	T	O	M	E	■	S	T	A	R	E	R	S
S	E	T	U	P	■	T	A	I	■	R	E	U	S	E
T	R	E	B	E	K	■	M	O	L	A	S	S	E	S
■	■	■	■	■	I	R	A	N	I	■	■	■	■	■
J	O	A	N	B	A	E	Z	■	P	A	M	P	A	S
A	N	N	U	L	■	A	E	S	■	P	E	R	S	E
M	A	C	N	E	I	L	■	A	M	P	L	E	S	T
A	N	I	■	A	R	I	■	G	O	O	■	P	U	T
I	D	E	A	T	E	S	■	E	N	S	N	A	R	E
C	O	N	T	E	N	T	■	S	T	E	E	R	E	R
A	N	T	A	R	E	S	■	T	E	S	T	E	R	S

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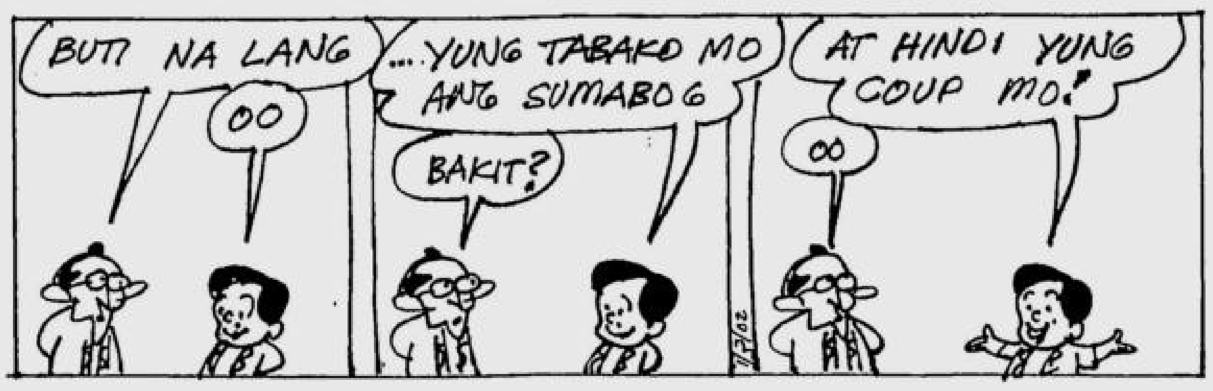
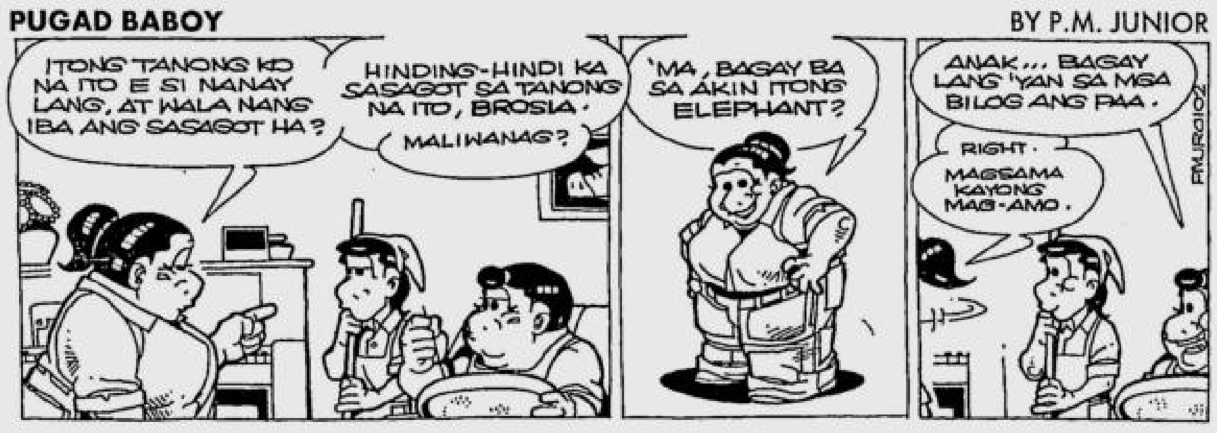
11/19/01

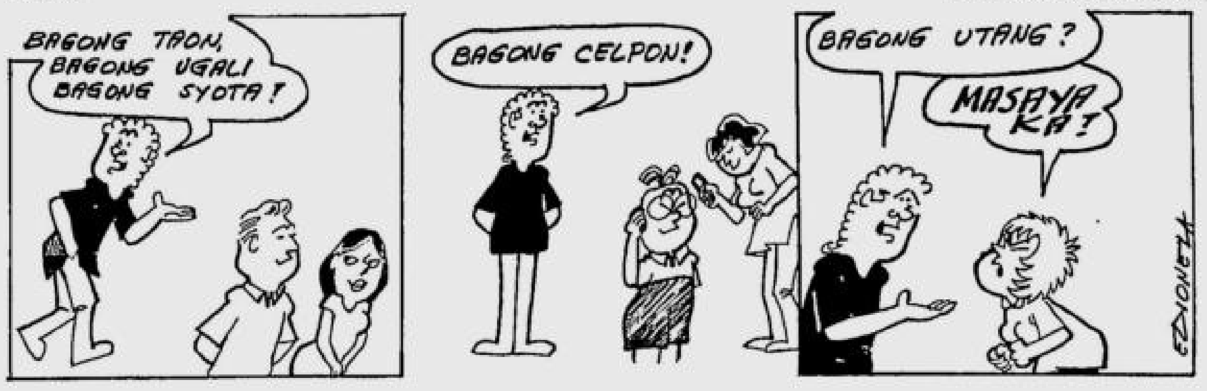
A. LIPIN BY JESS ABRERA


BUTI NA LANG
OO
...YUNG TABAKO MO ANG SUMABOG
BAKIT?
AT HINDI YUNG COUP MO!
OO
1/3/02

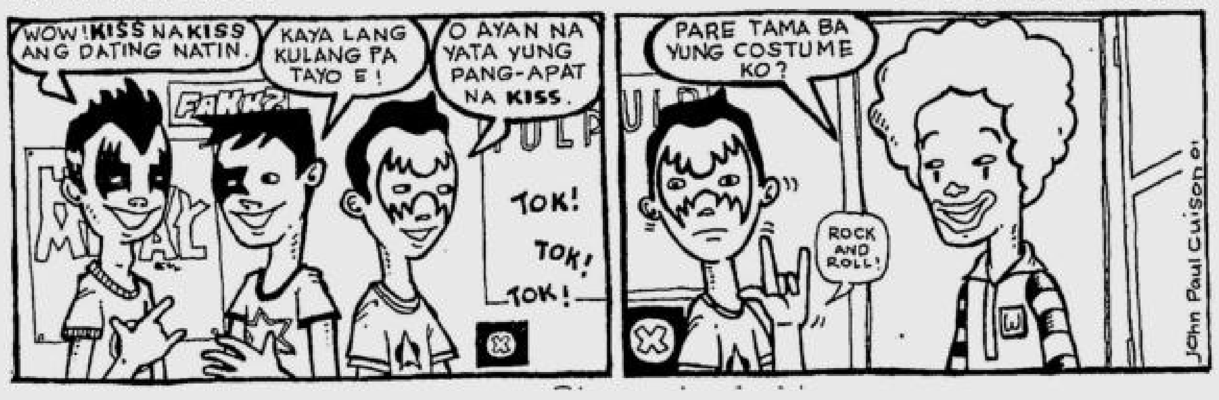
PUGAD BABOY BY P.M. JUNIOR


ITONG TANONG KO NA ITO E SI NANAY LANG, AT WALA NANG IBA ANG SASAGOT HA?
HINDING-HINDI KA SASAGOT SA TANONG NA ITO, BROSIA. MALIWANAG?
'MA, BAGAY BA SA AKIN ITONG ELEPHANT?
ANAK... BAGAY LANG 'YAN SA MGA BILOG ANG PAA.
RIGHT. MAGSAMA KAYONG MAG-AMO.
PMJR0102

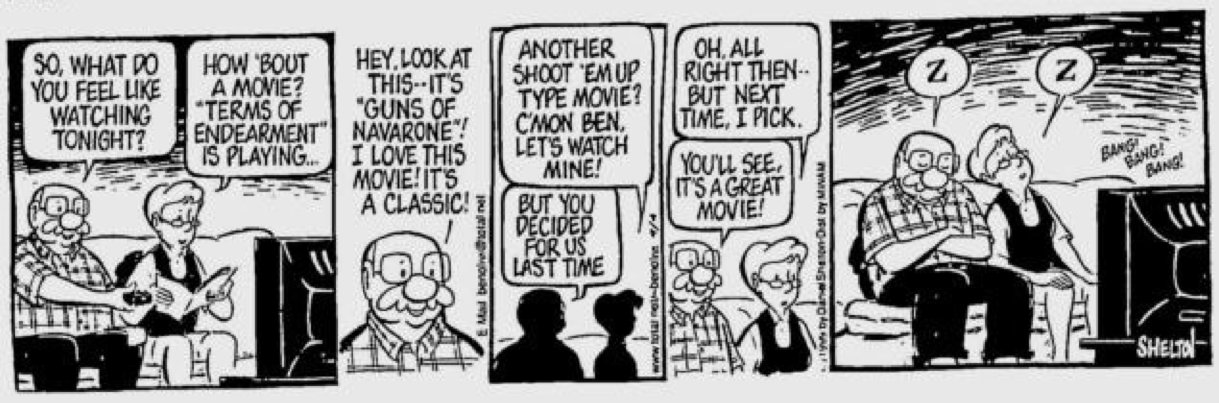
SIMO BY EDGAR DIONELA


BAGONG TAON, BAGONG UGALI BAGONG SYOTA!
BAGONG CELPON!
BAGONG UTANG?
MASAYA KA?
EDIONELA

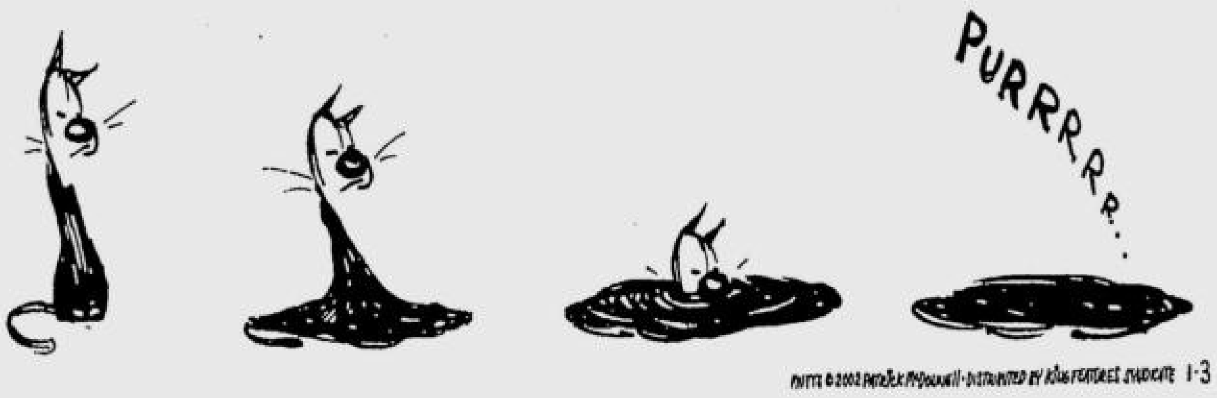
GARAPATA BLOOD BY JOHN PAUL CUISON


WOW! KISS NA KISS ANG DATING NATIN.
KAYA LANG KULANG PA TAYO E!
O AYAN NA YATA YUNG PANG-APAT NA KISS.
TOK! TOK! TOK!
PARE TAMA BA YUNG COSTUME KO?
ROCK AND ROLL!
John Paul Cuison 01

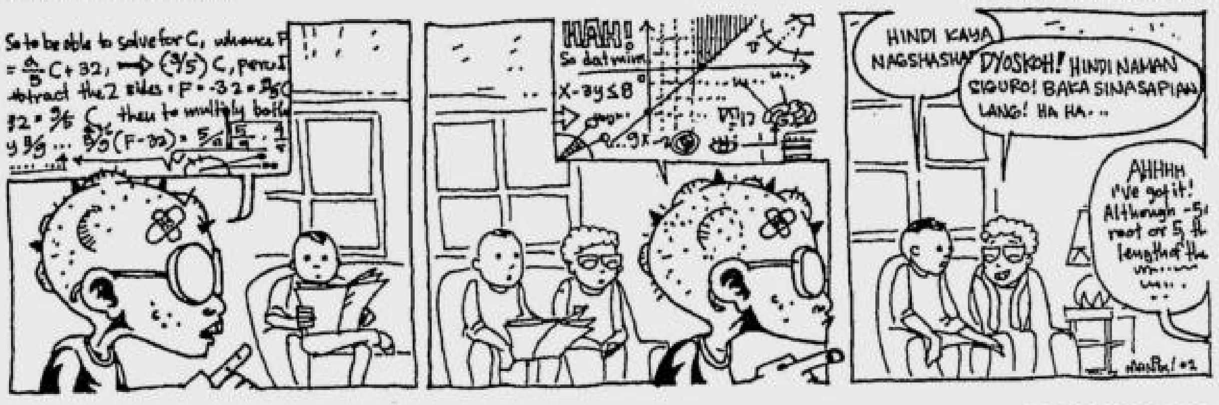
BEN BY DANIEL SHELTON


SO, WHAT DO YOU FEEL LIKE WATCHING TONIGHT?
HOW 'BOUT A MOVIE? "TERMS OF ENDEARMENT" IS PLAYING...
HEY, LOOK AT THIS--IT'S "GUNS OF NAVARONE"! I LOVE THIS MOVIE! IT'S A CLASSIC!
ANOTHER SHOOT 'EM UP TYPE MOVIE? C'MON BEN, LET'S WATCH MINE!
BUT YOU DECIDED FOR US LAST TIME
OH, ALL RIGHT THEN.. BUT NEXT TIME, I PICK.
YOU'LL SEE, IT'S A GREAT MOVIE!
Z
Z
BANG! BANG! BANG!
SHELTON

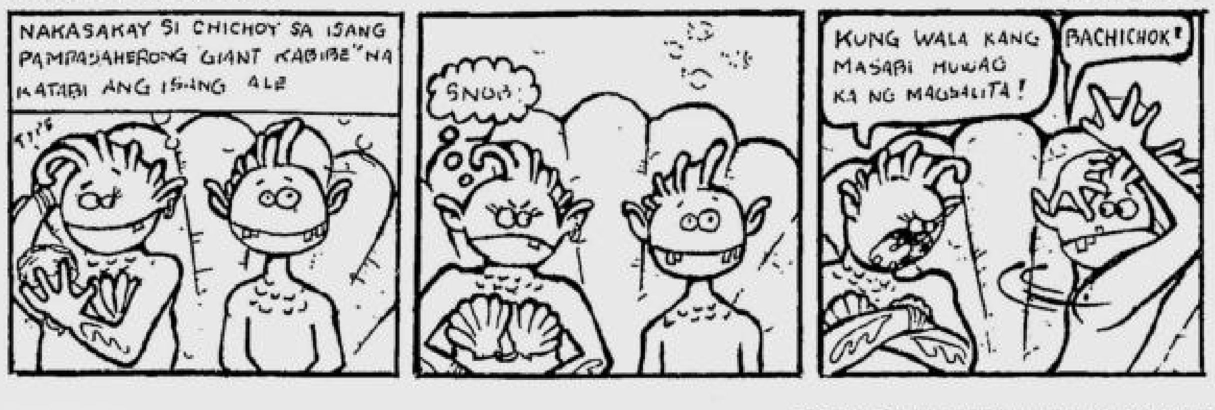
MUTTS BY PATRICK McDONNELL


PURRRRR...
MUTTS © 2002 PATRICK McDONNELL · DISTRIBUTED BY KING FEATURES SYNDICATE 1-3

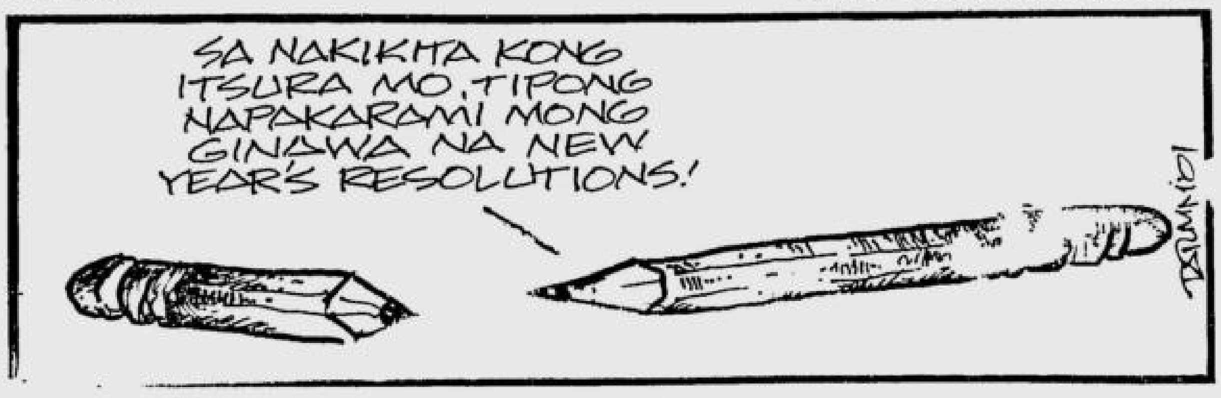
KIKO MACHINE BY MANIX ABRERA


HAH!
HINDI KAYA NAGSHASHA...
DYOSKOH! HINDI NAMAN SIGURO! BAKA SINASAPIAN LANG! HA HA...
AHHHH I've got it!

CHICHOY CHOKOY BY IKOY RICIO


NAKASAKAY SI CHICHOY SA ISANG PAMPASAHERONG GIANT KABIBE NA KATABI ANG ISANG ALE
SNOB!
KUNG WALA KANG MASABI HUWAG KA NG MAGSALITA!
BACHICHOK!

TULDOK BY PAPU & TATUM MILAMBILING


SA NAKIKITA KONG ITSURA MO, TIPONG NAPAKARAMI MONG GINAWA NA NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS!

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Food safety tops 2001 consumer complaints

THE CONSUMER

Marietta Velasco Giron

NEXT to grievances related to cellular phones, gripes about food safety were at the top of the list of complaints we received this year. These were followed by poor customer service, violation of senior citizens' rights and purchase of lemon cars.

Food safety, unfortunately, is one of the countless now-you-see-it-now-you-don't regulations in the country. Poor implementation, or lack of it, can be blamed for food poisoning and other food-borne illnesses that perennially affect consumers.

Those of you who saw the two episodes of dead meat trading aired recently on "Imbestigador" over GMA Channel 7 would be horrified to see proof of the sale of "hot" meat at the wet markets in Metro Manila and the food processing industry. The meat could have come from local poultry and hog raisers, but it could also have been smuggled from other countries.

We take this chance to congratulate the producers of "Imbestigador" for the fearless exposé of consumer issues.

Eating-out woes

Complaints from readers about contaminated dishes at restaurants and delicacy stores prove that both food servers and sanitation authorities have been sleeping on their jobs.

Here are some complaints:

Marjorie Villareal and friends were having brewed coffee at a place on Kalayaan Avenue, Makati when she noticed something solid in her coffee. When she stirred her drink, she was horrified to find out the solid object was a little roach. It so happened that she and her friends were talking excitedly about the bugs and roaches sold on the streets of Bangkok for their exotic tastes.

When she brought the problem to the waiter's attention, he immediately replaced the coffee. That would have been commendable but the waiter used the same cup, unwashed. Marjorie knew because the smear of her lipstick was still on the cup.

The manager gave a 15 percent discount on the bill and enclosed a business card with a note at the back giving Marjorie a 10 percent discount on her next visit. But Marjorie V. swore, "No way will I go back to that coffee shop again."

Sheela Sabandal bought four long eclairs from a doughnut shop for her kid's breakfast the following day. She put her purchase in the refrigerator so they would not spoil. But the filling was spoiled the next day. Although she did get a refund for her money when she returned the eclairs to the doughnut shop, she also heard insults from the store clerks.

"What can I do about stores that don't think food spoilage is a serious matter? What do I do to protect my kids and make sure it doesn't happen again?" she asked.

M. Alfaro and his lawyer-sister were shocked to scoop out a dead fly from the chili sauce at a popular restaurant in Greenbelt. The waiters tried to remove the fly with a spoon, but Alfaro and sister would not let them until they could bring the problem to the attention of a top official of the restaurant. The personnel manager appeared and said the restaurant management had no control over such foul-up, putting the blame on their concessionaire.

Beatrice Baluyut and her family were having a fish hotpot dish at one of the restaurants in Powerplant. She picked up a piece of garlic—or what she thought was garlic—to chew on. It was unusually tough, so she discreetly removed it from her mouth to find out what it was. It turned out to be a thumbtack.

Restaurant pet peeves

We don't know if there has been a local survey of things that spoil dining out, so we're passing on this study from abroad, as requested by a student of hotel and restaurant management. The Consumer Reports Online posted last year the question: "What are your pet peeves about dining out?" It compiled the following list, based on 700 responses:

- Bad manners. Waiters who are rude or too solicitous, who call you "you guys," who never apologize or say thanks, who drop off the check midmeal or grab the tip before you've left, who ask, "Do you want the change?"
- Bad service. Waiters who are ill-informed, inattentive, or don't quote the price of daily specials; who are slow to refill water glasses; who bring the second course before you've finished the first.
- Unappetizing restrooms.
- Gross greens. Soggy or over-the-hill salads, iceberg lettuce, limp vegetables.
- Inhospitable interiors. Too cool, too dim, too-close tables, too little space between smoking and non-smoking sections.
- Poor hygiene. Servers with long nails, or dangling hair, whose "tarantula" hands touch the business part of dinnerware; who tuck the order pad inside their slacks. (If we may add, waiters who tuck pencils or pen behind their ears or between their lips.)
- Sticky stuff. Chairs, tables and condiment containers.
- Inconsiderate customers. People who let cell phones and pagers chirp; parents who let kids run amok.

No free drinking water

Why are many food establishments not giving free drinking water anymore? More and more establishments don't serve water for free. When we asked one restaurant manager, he said tap water in most parts of Metro Manila was at risk of contamination. Restaurants don't want to be blamed for any ailment resulting from dirty water.

Be that as it may, here's a letter from A. Aguinaldo of ata2@edsamail.com.ph. "The Food Park at The Enterprise Building is a classy and cozy place where working people of nearby offices flock for their breakfast, lunch and dinner. It provides practically everything to customers—clean surroundings, wide-range of food, reasonable prices, even spectacular view—except for basic drinking water from the tap. You have to pay P13 for your drinking water at New York Café.

"If the establishment could provide customers with good eating utensils, wicker chairs, artificial foliage, mosaic tables and lots of Christmas decor, is it too much to provide a free glass of drinking water?"

E-mail the author at mgiron@csi.com.ph

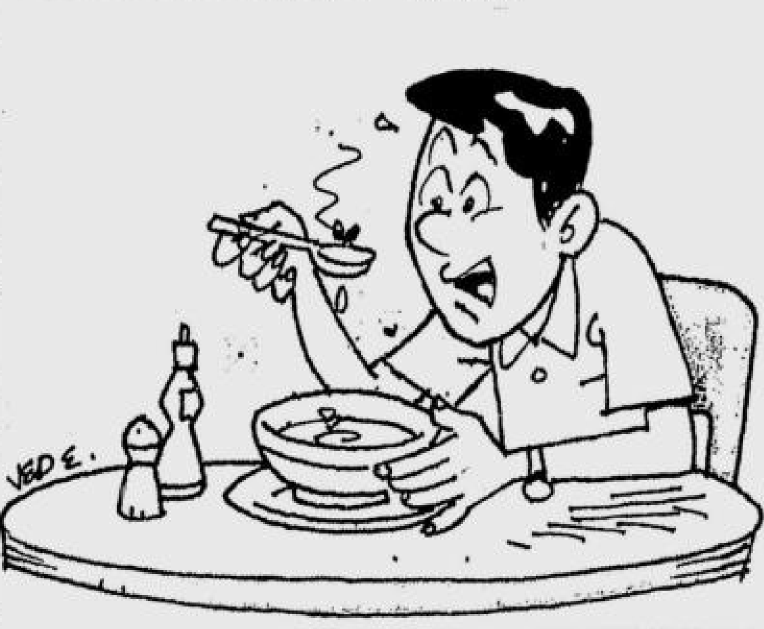


ILLUSTRATION: JED ESTRADA

SAN MIGUEL
Great ... d club
living ... d life

SANDY Daza

GLENDA Barretto

New consumer club launched

IT was an afternoon like no other especially for great food lovers as the merger of two of the biggest consumer clubs in the country, San Miguel and Purefoods, was launched.

The clubs will now be known as the San Miguel Great Food Club.

Tina Revilla, a foodie herself, hosted the event. Mascots of the various brands—Monterey, Magnolia Chicken, Purefoods and Cheezee—opened the event with a lively dance.

Enrique A. Gomez Jr., San Miguel Food Group president, delivered an inspirational message. It was followed by the ceremonial lighting of the unity candle by Camille G. Herce, vice president and marketing director of San Miguel Food Group, and Ernesto P. Sotto, VP and sales and marketing director of Purefoods Hormel. Ivy Violan did three songs.

Three culinary experts gave a cooking demonstration. Sandy Daza delighted the audience with his 1001 ways with Magnolia ground chicken and gave cooking tips for glazed Purefoods Fiesta Ham for Christmas.

Glenda Barretto showed the Via Mare way of elegantly presenting the cream cheese-stuffed Monterey Tenderloin. Barretto's magical touch transformed the ordinary *kalabasa* into a sophisticated Pumpkin Cheesecake dessert with cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves.

Sylvia Reynoso-Gala showed that cooking can be both fulfilling and fun. She demonstrated that roasting Monterey Baby Back Ribs can be very easy.

Members of the San Miguel Great Food Club sampled the latest products. A raffle was held with prizes from sponsors like Glad and Tefal. The grand prize was a table top oven from La Germania.

Basketball players of Purefoods Hotdog made a surprise visit.

Those interested to join the San Miguel Great Food Club can send three wrappers or proof of purchase of San Miguel Food Group products like Monterey, Magnolia Chicken, Purefoods-Hormel, Magnolia Butter and Cheese, and CampoCarne with their application form. They can get forms by sending self-addressed stamped envelopes to San Miguel Culinary Center on Eagle corner Legazpi Street, Bo. Ugong, Pasig City or register online at www.sanmiguelculinary.com.

Ponkan Glaze for Ham

1 kg Purefoods Fiesta Ham
¼ c red wine
½ c Ponkan orange juice
1 pc bay leaf
1/3 c brown sugar

Combine wine, orange juice, bay leaf and brown sugar. Mix well and boil until mixture becomes thick. Score the fat surface of the ham using a sharp knife. Press onto surface a layer of brown sugar. Insert cloves if desired. Put in a roasting pan. Pour prepared glaze over ham. Bake for 15 minutes and baste ham occasionally. Glaze is good for 1 kg ham.

Festive Ham and Cheese Platter

1 pc Magnolia Queso de Bola, sliced and cubed
1 pc Purefoods Fiesta Ham, sliced thinly
1 pc CampoCarne Jamon de Bola, sliced thinly

Garnishing:
Assorted fresh fruits and lettuce greens
Asparagus spears
Pickled onions
Stuffed green olives

Arrange ham slices, cheese slices and cheese cubes on a large platter. Decorate with fresh fruits, asparagus spears, pickled onions, green olives and lettuce greens.

Chicken Embutido

1 pack Magnolia Chicken Giniling
½ c CampoCarne Chicken Hotdog, chopped
2 pc Purefoods Chorizos Bilbao style, chopped finely
½ c CampoCarne Lean and Mean Bacon, chopped
1 c Magnolia Quickmelt Cheese, cubed
¼ c raisins
½ c sweet pickle relish
½ c tomato sauce
1 tsp iodized salt
½ tsp ground black pepper
1 egg
3 tbsp cornstarch
2 eggs, boiled, peeled and quartered
Glad aluminum foil for wrapping

Combine the ground chicken, chopped chicken hotdog, *chorizo*, bacon, cheese, raisins, pickle relish and tomato sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Mix very well. Add egg and then cornstarch. Mix well.

Take a sheet of aluminum foil, about 1 ft long. Spread the chicken mixture in the center to form a log. Put the quartered hard-cooked eggs in the center and cover with more chicken mixture. Roll up the foil tightly and seal the edges by twisting the ends.

Bake at 350°F for an hour or steam for an hour. This may also be used as stuffing for chicken *relleno* or roast chicken. Makes 6-8 servings.

Tenderloin Stuffed with Garlic Cheese with Red Wine Sauce

1 kg Monterey Beef Tenderloin
1 tsp salt
1/8 tsp pepper
2 tbsp (20 g) Magnolia Butter

Using a thin bladed knife, make a lengthwise cut at the center of the meat, then season with salt and pepper. Heat butter in a pan and sear the meat all around. Insert the stuffing by carefully squeezing it out from the cling wrap as you go from one to another. Wrap with aluminum foil and roast in a 350°F oven for about 8-10 minutes for medium doneness.

Let stand 10 minutes before slicing.

Stuffing:
½ bar (100 g) Magnolia Cream Cheese
½ c (100 g) sour cream
1 slice bread, crust removed, diced
1½ tsp garlic, minced

CAMILLE Herce, VP and marketing director of San Miguel Food Group, and Ernie Sotto, VP and sales and marketing director of Purefoods-Hormel, light the unity candle signifying the merging of the two consumer clubs.

SYLVIA Reynoso-Gala

1/8 tsp ground black pepper
2 tsp fresh basil, chopped

Combine all the stuffing ingredients and mix thoroughly. Wrap enough stuffing in a cling wrap and refrigerate.

Red Wine Sauce:
2 tbsp Magnolia Butter
1 tbsp garlic, minced
1 medium onion, diced
250 g beef trimmings
1 stalk celery, diced
1 whole leeks
1 pc bay leaf
1 tsp peppercorn whole
1 small carrot, diced
6 c beef broth
½ c red wine
½ tsp kitchen bouquet
Salt and pepper

Heat butter in a pan and sauté the garlic and onion. Add the beef trimmings and sauté further, for about 2 minutes. Add the vegetables, broth, red wine and simmer for about 1 hour. Add the roux and simmer further for 30 minutes. Strain.

Roux: Melt 3 tbsp butter in a pan, add 3 tbsp flour and cook until it turns light brown.

Pumpkin Cheesecake

14 pcs Graham crackers
2 tbsp (20 g) Magnolia Butter, melted
4 1/3 bar (975 g) Magnolia Cream Cheese, at room temperature
1¼ c (250 g)sugar
5 pcs eggs
1½ tsp grated orange zest
1½ grated lime zest
2 c (450 g) pumpkin purée
½ tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp nutmeg
2 tsp ground anise
1 tsp ground cloves
2 tsp ground coriander
¼ c whipping cream
¼ c sour cream
3 tbsp Bravo rhum
1 1/3 c (150 g) walnuts, chopped medium-fine

Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F (gas mark 4). Process the crackers and ½ c (50 g) walnuts in a processor or blender to make fine crumbs. Brush 2 cake pans about 10 inches in diameter and 3-inch deep with the melted butter. Coat evenly with the crumbs.

Cut the cheese into small chunks. In a large bowl, whisk until creamy; gradually beat in the sugar and work until very soft, with no lumps remaining. On low speed, add the eggs, one at a time. Beat in the grated zests, pumpkin, cinnamon, nutmeg, anise, cloves and coriander. Add the cream, sour cream and rhum. Beat to blend.

Pour the cheese mixture into the prepared pans. Sprinkle evenly with remaining nuts. Set pans onto a bigger cake pan. Pour in boiling water to reach halfway up the sides. Set in the center of the moderate oven and bake for 1½ hours.

Set on a rack to cool completely. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours.

To unmold, dip the tin into very hot water for about 30 seconds. Run a knife carefully around the edge. Invert the cake onto a plate, then invert onto a serving dish, so the nuts are on top. To serve, dip a wide cake knife in hot water to cut each slice.

Pumpkin purée:

Cut a 700 g whole pumpkin in half, remove the seeds and clean thoroughly. Put back together, wrap with foil and bake until cooked (about 30 minutes) Scrape the flesh with a spoon and put in a blender or processor and purée until smooth.

How to liven up leftovers

WITH ALL the merriment that comes with Filipino parties, there is bound to be an overflow of food. Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce, the world's favorites marinade for all kinds of cooking, shares these tips to help bring new life to all the food on the menu.

- Leftover roast turkey (or even fried chicken) can be recycled as an all-around meal like *chopsuey*. Just add your favorite veggies (like cabbage, cauliflower, carrots, celery, red pepper, most of which you will have in store already.) Season with soy sauce and Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce.
- *Lechon kawali* can be used as the *bagnet* (crispy pork) in *pinakbet*.
- Fried fish such as *lapu-lapu* can be turned into *tocho*: Sauté garlic, onion, tomatoes and ginger, *tausi* (or *tahure*) vinegar, add a tablespoon of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce to perk up the flavors.
- Day-old bread can be made into breadcrumbs: (just grate and keep in a bottle inside the refrigerator). This can be used in coating meat and vegetables before frying; can also be used to thicken sauces.
- Broiled or steamed fish (i.e. *tilapia*, *lapu-lapu*) can be flaked then combine with mayonnaise, pickle relish, finely chopped white onion, a drop or two of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce. You'll have a delicious sandwich spread with new twist.
- Pork barbecue can be turned into a delicious dish by removing them from the barbecue sticks, adding mushroom, carrots and young corn with brown sauce. Liven up by adding a tablespoon of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce.
- Your favorite leftover Lea & Perrins *adobo* can be made into a Pinoy-style pizza: spread pizza sauce over halved *pan de sal* then top with flaked *adobo*, sliced bell peppers and grated cheese then bake for about 5 minutes.
- Christmas ham has a second life in omelets, potato salad, sandwiches and soups. Add Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce to these dishes to give it a delicious twist.
- Add strips or cubed barbecued pork chops to sautéed vegetables for a delightful new taste.
- Don't let those juicy bones go to waste. Slowly boil turkey, chicken or ham bones with onion, carrot, celery. Seasoned with salt and pepper and a tablespoon or two Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce and, voila! you have a delicious soup stock. Freeze and store for future use.
- Want a money-saving pasta sauce? Flake or cube leftover chicken meat or fried or steamed fish. Combine either with cream or tomato sauce and button mushrooms.
- Slice or cube leftover ham, bacon or chicken for your vegetable or potato salad. Drizzle it with vinaigrette or mayonnaise dressing mixed with a drop or two of Lea & Perrins Worcestershire Sauce. It will produce a delightful piquant taste.

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LIFESTYLE
CHELO BANAL-FORMOSO, Editor

From paparazzi to restaurateur

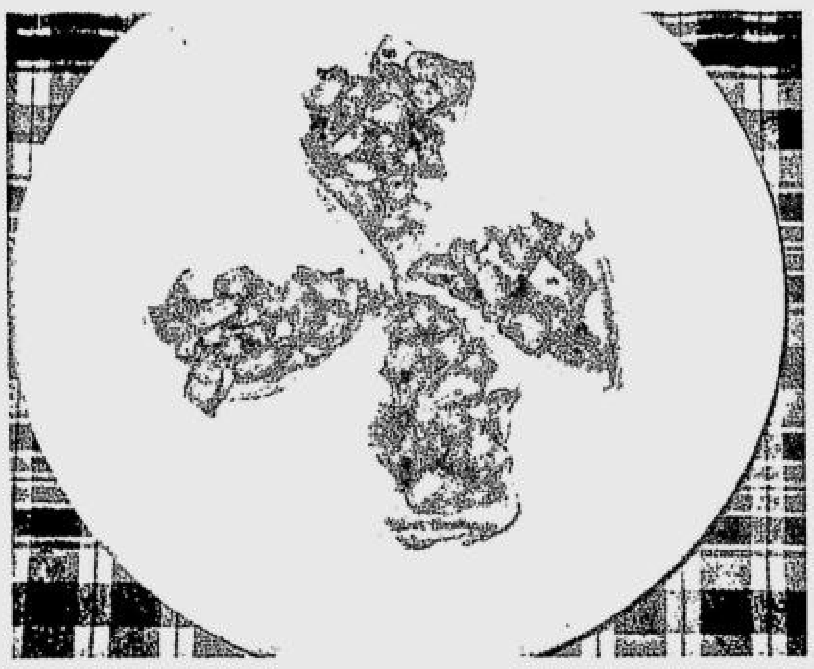
IN GOOD TASTE

Doreen G. Fernandez

I WAS paparazzi," asserts Roberto Bellini, as he proudly presides over Bellini's Italian Restaurant (Marikina Shoe Expo, Cubao, QC; tel. 913-2550) and presents his wife, partner and fellow chef, Ma. Luisa, a Filipina. Pictures on the wall show him posing, photographing (and sometimes conflicting with bodyguards of) the great and famous: President Clinton, Madonna, Frank Sinatra, the Pope.

No more tussling where he is; the restaurant has been open for some five years, right in the heart of the shoe shops, where he has faithful *suki*, among them the Marikina Rotary Club. Unbelievably, there is parking right alongside, even on a busy Thursday noonday. More believably, the food is good, and at least two friends have sent me e-mail asking me to try it out—to enjoy, and to keep it from closing.

It was Tony Lambino, my fellow faculty member at the Communication Department, Ateneo, who took me there—because he is often there, he enjoys it and has taken his girl, her family, his friends there. He knows the two Bellini children, Ma. Luisa's sister, the agile and spirited waiting staff.



BRUSCHETTA al Pomodoro

Right in the heart of shoe shops in Cubao is a resto that serves hearty Italian food, from fresh pasta to homemade sweet wine

RISOTTO with mushrooms (top) and Fettucine Pizzaiola

Generous servings

We all liked the food, which we ordered with Roberto's help, not even glancing at the menu.

The day's fresh pasta was ravioli, stuffed with spinach and ham, with truffle oil in the sauce. That for me, truly al dente and interesting. Fresh too, was the fettuccine Trish chose to have with a pizzaiola sauce; and so was Tony's spaghettini with smoked salmon, and Juliet's three-color penne all'arrabbiata. In other words, all Bellini pastas are homemade and fresh. The servings are so generous that one serving (a platter) could well serve two diners.

And yet we were curious enough to order a *bruschetta al pomodoro* (with sweet red tomatoes) to start, and a *risotto al funghi* to share. The latter is wonderful, and I resolve to go back for it in the New Year.

Roberto does not carry a long wine list, but we looked at what he had, and he helped us choose a friendly red French wine that we felt was right for our pastas.

The food came promptly and hot; the service was attentive and punctilious; Roberto and Ma. Luisa not only answered questions but conversed. We felt completely at home, and regretted not having room for anything else after the meal but coffee/cappuccino and a tot of Roberto's homemade, secret-formula sweet wine to close the experience.

ROBERTO Bellini with his paparazzi memories

When we got home, I finally opened the menu I had borrowed—"I give you Mona Lisa," said Roberto, choosing among the Tower of Pisa (he's from the town) and other covers. We'd only had *bruschetta*, but the appetizers include grilled eggplant and mozzarella, grilled mixed salad, and more.

Cavalcade of pastas

The pastas to choose from are a cavalcade of shapes and sizes: tagliatelle, rigatoni, spaghetti, fettuccine, maccheroni, penne, fusilli, farfalle, raviolini, tortellini, capellini. Some 10 basic sauces (*amatriciana*, *Bolognese*, *carbonara*, *funghi*, *pesto*, *pomodoro*, *puttanesca* and Bellini (tomato and eggplant) are bolstered by specialties, *al tonno* (tuna sauce), *agli scampi* (shrimp), *alla rustica* (sausage, garlic, chili and tomato) and *arrabbiata* (tomato sauce, bacon, onion and chili). Two risottos (mushrooms; mussels) and a Caesar salad complete the list. Roberto offers, however, to do pastas and pizzas for your wish and whim, even with *ampalaya*, which does not grow in Italy.

Two pages list 21 pizzas—with many-splendored and multiflavored toppings, from anchovies and asparagus to salami and tuna. The meats start with *ossobuco* and march through *scaloppine alla pizzaiola*, *bistecca*, *pollo alla diavola*, *lombata di maiale* (pork chop). Blue marlin, a *fritto misto* fried or grilled, prawns and tuna in tomato sauce, swim by to attract tasters.

And the sweet of tooth can choose among grandmother's cake (*torta della nonna*), *tiramisu*, fried apple, caramelized orange, fruit salad, jam tart and *panna cotta*.

Hearty, basic daily Italian food. Prices are reasonable, and we are already thinking of post-Christmas parties and pasta fiestas, and more Bellini magic for 2002, especially since it is opening a small branch on Katipunan Avenue in mid-December.

Holiday postscript

BY JAN. 6, Twelfth Night, the holiday season will be officially over, but unofficially we Filipinos will still be thinking in holiday mode. I now suggest that not only food might enter your holidays, but also music (the Jesuit Communications CDs), and now visual art. Phyllis Zaballero has an exhibit of her paintings at Valerie Duemila, Megamall, with many paintings on food in various global settings. Visit, gaze, enjoy, perhaps purchase, and at the very least take the memory home to reflect upon in tranquility.

May your New Year be blest with peace and serendipity.

BAKING BOOK LAUNCHED

"Baking Made EC" by teacher turned food writer Eufemia "EC" Estrada is currently enjoying brisk sales in bookstores nationwide. The author (third from left) is shown with family members, book buyers and well-wishers at the book's launching in October at National Bookstore Shangri-La. Samples of EC's delicious Cracked Chocolate Cookies and Lemon Cake were given away to book buyers.

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